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THE DEVELOPMENT OF STYLE IN TRADITIONAL GAELIC  
NARRATIVE, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO 'RUNS'.

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Gaelic society included a professional class of men of learning, whose origins go back to the prehistoric period. The learned men called filid were guardians of a native literature in prose and verse, transmitted by recitation and memory. Oral recitation is continuous and influential despite the introduction of writing.

Within the narrative literature prose and verse maintain different roles. Narrative is in prose, while verse is reserved to heighten important utterances of the characters. Other dialogue is in realistic direct speech, terse and ironic. Verse was probably sung, prose spoken, and dialogue given dramatic expression, providing a variety of sounds in performance. The characteristic brevity of the dialogue was adapted in narrative prose by the monastic scribes, who first recorded the native tales for reference. In Middle Irish the narrative becomes fuller, as in modern oral recitation; which cultivates dialogue, though rarely verse.

Conventional descriptive passages or 'runs' appear first in ninth century manuscript tales, but preserve ancient traditions. Some of the early types are found in archaic stressed metre, and the ornaments of alliteration and rhythmic repetition found in stressed verse become regular in prose descriptions. Many of the manuscript 'runs' are preserved in modern oral tradition, where they are spoken differently from the prose narrative, in a rapid chant. They are a highly esteemed part of the oral tellers' repertoire, recited word



for word at an appropriate point in any tale. Such a usage would explain their exclusion from the early recordings of individual tales. In Early Modern Irish tales the style of the 'runs' influences the narrative, as the practice of reading aloud allowed whole tales to be transmitted in ornamental language.

Nevertheless the variation of prose narrative, run, and dialogue, re-established in modern oral tales, appears to be, with the addition of poems, the oral style once cultivated by the filid.

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### The Learned Men in Gaelic Society I

The Celts probably reached Ireland several centuries before Christ, where, unlike those who inhabited Gaul and Britain, they remained outside the Roman Empire and undisturbed by foreign conquest or settlement. Their early traditions, notably the tales of the 'Ulster cycle' and the native laws, reflect an archaic society, in the words of D. Binchy<sup>1</sup>: 'tribal, rural, hierarchical, and familiar'. The country was divided into many small political units, each ruled by a local king. There were also provincial kings. There were no towns, and wealth was reckoned in cattle or slaves. The family was the basic unit of society, and there was a rigid distinction between the noble kindreds and the common people, who are hardly mentioned at all in the aristocratic Ulster cycle tales. However there was also a third class, the aes dána 'men of skill' between the aristocracy and the common people. These included men of learning: poets, lawyers, historians, physicians; as well as skilled craftsmen: smiths, jewellers, musicians; and, by the time the laws were written down, Christian churchmen as well. Christianity reached Ireland in the 5th century AD, and all the surviving Gaelic records show signs of its influence. At about the same time there was a migration of Gaelic speakers from Northern Ireland to western Scotland, which thus became part of the same cultural area.

The antiquity of the native culture can be corroborated by comparing it with Classical descriptions of the Continental Celts

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1. Secular Institutions, in *Early Irish Society* ed. M. Dillon (1954) p. 54.

around the beginning of the Christian era. It seems likely that Athenas, Diodorus Siculus, Strabo and Julius Caesar all draw on a lost account by the Greek ethnographer Poseidonius, written about 80 BC.<sup>1</sup> Julius Caesar<sup>2</sup> mentions the threefold division of society; the commons plebes 'nearly regarded as slaves', the warriors equites<sup>3</sup>, and the druids druides. They are concerned with religious instruction and judgements, and are exempt from both taxes and military service. Their organization extends throughout Gaul and they meet in a central assembly once a year. The training of their students lasts twenty years, during which huge amounts of poetry are committed to memory. The druids think it improper to write this learning down, though they know the Greek alphabet and use it in their accounts.

The other classical writers give a fuller account of the learned men. According to Diodorus<sup>4</sup> and Strabo<sup>5</sup> there were three grades; firstly poets called 'bards', singers of eulogy and satire to music; next seers, who perform augury and sacrifice; and lastly the druids given special honour as philosophers. Strabo says the druids are entrusted with giving judgement, and that the people believe that many such cases will result in fruitful fields.

This picture agrees remarkably well with that gained from native sources of the men of learning in early Ireland, even to the

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1. J. Tierney, 'The Celtic Ethnography of Poseidonius', *PRIA* LX (1960) 189-275, who edits and discusses the relevant texts.

2. *De Bello Gallico* VI §13.

3. see §15.

4. V §31.

5. IV 4 §4.



native terms druí 'druid', bard 'bard', and fili, etymologically 'seer'. According to the Irish laws, they (and churchmen) are entitled to high status and legal privileges, as part of the nemed or 'sacred' class. They, their property and land are immune from carnage and plunder. Most men lose their status outside their own political unit, but the qualifications of learning are recognised throughout Ireland, so that the learned men form a national institution as in Gaul.

Within the learned men there are further divisions of status. The status of the bard is rather low, though still with his continental functions of eulogy and satire. However one must probably see Christian influence in the legal status of the druids. They appear in the early tales as companions and indeed relatives of kings, their advisers and interpreters of omens. But in the 8th century law text Uraicecht Bec<sup>1</sup> they are counted as daernemed 'base nemed' while the fili are reckoned with princes and bishops as saernemed 'noble nemed'. In Christian literature the druids are always adamant supporters of paganism, and in later tales figure largely as wizards. Draoidheacht 'druidry' is still the word for 'magic' in modern times.

The earliest native records show the fili as the chief learned men. The definition of them given in the Old Irish Triads<sup>2</sup> concentrates on their mantic function: the three things which give a fili his status tréde neimthigedar fili are still the three divinatory rites of imbais for·osnaí 'knowledge which enlightens',

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1. AIL V 90.

2. § 123.

teinm laedo 'prophetic marrow-chewing' and díchetal di chennaib 'incantation from heads'. According to the Middle Irish introduction to the legal compilation called Senchas Már<sup>1</sup>, St Patrick abolished the first two of these, but left the fili with all kinds of poetry, genealogy, and story-telling. A 10th century tract<sup>2</sup> divides their learning between twelve years of study, as they pass through seven grades to reach the highest, that of ollamh 'professor'. The three divinatory rites are learnt in the eighth year, together with<sup>3</sup>

'Dinnshenchus ocus prímscéla h'érend fria n-aisnéis do ríghaib ocus flaithib ocus dagdhoínib';

'The place-name lore and chief tales of Ireland for telling to kings, princes and noblemen';

and the text adds Níba fili cen scéla 'He would not be a fili without tales.' However in early Ireland there also seems to have been a class of specialist storytellers (scélaige<sup>4</sup>), and other retainers to the aristocracy might also be called upon for tales.<sup>5</sup> The fili can also be a judge<sup>6</sup> (but this is normally a function of the specialist class of brithem); or a satirist.<sup>7</sup> Literary references show the fili going on circuit to visit different patrons<sup>8</sup>, and the rewards due for different verse compositions are laid down by law.<sup>9</sup> Other functions

1. AIL I 45, see D. Binchy, *Studia Celtica* X-XI (1975-6) 15-28.

2. Dá ernail déc na filidheachta 'The twelve divisions of fili-lore', ed. R. Thurneysen IT III, *Mittelirische Vehrslernen* II.

3. §91.

4. Lg §1, Tromd. Guaire l. 1005 - a member of the ollamh's retinue.

5. T. Emere §5, C. Almaine §§ 3, 8.

6. AIL V 11.

7. SC sv. gaire.

8. Talland Étair RC VIII 474.

9. MV II 93.



of the fili are well illustrated in the Old Irish Mongán tales: telling tales in his patron's hall 'every night from Samain to Bealtainn', giving historical information (the death of Fothad Airgdech)<sup>1</sup> and the origin of standing stones and forts,<sup>2</sup> and threatening to blight the fertility of the land.<sup>3</sup> He is an expert in both natural and supernatural knowledge.

The transmission of this learning, in Ireland as in Gaul, seems to have been by the spoken word and the trained memory, as claimed in the introduction to the Senchas Már<sup>4</sup>: concuimne dá tsean, tidnacul cluaise di araile, dícetal filed 'the joint memory of two ancients, the transmission from one ear to another, the chanting of the poets.' An Old Irish tale<sup>5</sup> shows a fili and a saint learning each other's gospel and poems by rote after one or two hearings. In the 3rd or 4th century AD Ireland had gained the alphabet of Ogam letters, so that the principle of writing was known as in Gaul, but its principal function seems to have been on memorial stones, and there is no evidence that it was used for writing down learned texts. It was not till after the coming of Christianity that the Latin alphabet was adapted for writing down texts in Irish, thus preserving the early traditions in abundance to the present day. All the early manuscripts that we know of were written in the monasteries, indeed 'all the evidence goes to show that, whatever part the poets played in

1. V. of Bran I 46.

2. Ériu VIII 156-7.

3. V. of Bran I 49.

4. AIL I 30.

5. Mac dá Cherda and Cummaine Foda ed. J. G. O'Keeffe, Ériu V 32.

the oral preservation of the tradition, its written record was the work of the church.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless the body of early vernacular texts is written in a standard language, classical Old Irish, which only the native filid could have developed and maintained; while internal evidence in the legal texts, now found only in late, secular manuscripts, suggests that the brehons may have been writing their own material as early as the 7th century.<sup>2</sup>

The monasteries of the Irish church, once established and endowed, would have been centres of Latin learning, and the practice of keeping annals enables one to follow the progress of ecclesiastical scholarship. By the mid-seventh century the deaths of sapientes are recorded, and at this time Bede tells<sup>3</sup> how students from England went to Ireland to study and were supported free by the natives, as in the much later accounts of bardic schools. By the early eighth century the annals record the deaths of scribes, who appear in a large number of different monasteries, and later those of the heads of monastic schools, the lector or fer léiginn, some of whom may have learnt secular lore, since the Church, in accepting donations of land to monasteries, undertook to educate the heirs of the hereditary lay tenants.<sup>4</sup> From the late ninth century on specialists in different branches of learning are mentioned: senchaid, cronicid 'historian'; fili, ollam, éices 'poet.'<sup>5</sup>

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1. R. Flower 1947 p. 73.

2. D. Binchy, *Studia Hibernica* I 17.

3. *Hist. Eccles.* III 27, quoted by Flower *op. cit.* p. 11.

4. K. Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* pp. 153-4.

5. K. Hughes, *The Distribution of Irish Scriptoria*, in *Studies in the Early British Church*.

Several beautiful Latin manuscripts survive from an earlier period, but the first we know of to contain native vernacular texts is the lost Cín Dromma Snechtai (CDS), probably written in the early eighth century.<sup>1</sup> It derived from an Ulster monastery probably connected with the better-known coastal foundation of Bangor.<sup>2</sup> Mac Cana sees this area as 'the cradle of written Irish literature', and the texts copied from CDS into later manuscripts are all secular and mostly of Northern interest.

At the very end of the eighth century the Viking raids on Ireland began, causing great destruction of manuscripts in the monasteries which they pillaged for their ecclesiastical treasures. After a spate of texts in 9th century Irish there are few literary records till the eleventh century. During this period many of the smaller and more vulnerable scriptoria disappear, including that of Bangor in the tenth century. Nevertheless the great inland houses of Armagh and Clonmacnoise were able to maintain monastic schools and scriptoria throughout. Eventually some of the Vikings settled and founded trading towns in the ports of Dublin, Limerick, and Waterford, the beginnings of the non-Irish speaking 'Pale.'

According to Cogadh Gaedheal re Gallaibh,<sup>3</sup> it was Brian Bóramha, high king and final 'victor over the Norse' at Clontarf in 1014, who rebuilt the churches and sent abroad for new books to replace those lost. At any rate the eleventh century saw a great upsurge of

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1. G. Murphy 'On the Date of Two Sources used in Thurneysen's *Heldensage*' *Ériu* XVI (1952) p. 151.

2. P. Mac Cana, *Ériu* XXIII 102.

3. p. 136.



monastic interest in learning of all kinds, including native. One manuscript, now lost, which contained secular tales and poetry as well as an Irish chronicle, was compiled by Dub dá Leithe (+1064) fer léiginn and later abbot of Armagh.

The material available to the scholars in Irish monasteries in the eleventh and twelfth centuries is clearly seen in three surviving manuscript compendia from central Ireland, which contain, not only historical, religious, and secular narrative texts in Irish, but also Irish translations of apocrypha and classical legends. These are the 'Book of the Dun Cow' Lebor na hUidre (LU) and Rawlinson B 502, from Clonmacnoise, and the Book of Leinster (LL), rightly Lebor na Nuachongbála, closely connected with Terryglass. LU is the earliest of these; the death of one of its scribes, Mael Muire, son of a bishop, is recorded in 1106.<sup>1</sup> LL is late twelfth century begun by Find, bishop of Kildare +1160 and Aed Ua Grimthainn, coarb of Terryglass, who was still writing in 1201. Both clearly derive much of their material from earlier manuscripts. LU refers to Cín Dromma Snechta and was extensively revised or added to by a later scribe<sup>2</sup> using material not previously available. Aed writes<sup>3</sup> that he drew his texts from many books 'a llebraib imdaib.' The contents of Rawlinson B 502 are less diverse than the others, consisting of biblical history and native historical tales and genealogies.

However not all the early literature is included in the relatively early manuscripts discussed already, but survives in secular

1. AFM.

2. Called 'H', Dipl. Ed. xvi-xix; see H. Oskamp, PRIA LXV 135; and T. Ó Concheanainn, Éigse XV 277-88, who identifies him with Mael Muire.

3. LL 313.

manuscripts of the fourteenth and later centuries. Increasing contact with the continent in the 11th and 12th centuries, while providing Irish with some of the foreign literary material visible in IU and LL, also brought Ireland within reach of the current movement for ecclesiastical centralization and reform. Previously the Irish church had been based on the monasteries which had been heavily influenced by the organization of secular society, with strong local allegiances and hereditary abbacies, often within the family of the original founder or donor of the land. However, five twelfth-century synods, culminating in the Synod of Kells in 1157, completed the process of giving Ireland an episcopal hierarchy as in the rest of Europe. Armagh became the chief see, and some other great monastic centres became bishoprics; but others, like Terryglass, were reduced to the status of parish churches. The monasteries themselves, often largely laicized, were reformed by the imposition of continental rules, and new monasteries were founded on the continental pattern. Laymen and lay interests could no longer be included. In fact LL has been called<sup>1</sup> 'the last fling of the learned ecclesiastics of the unreformed Irish church.'

Shortly after these changes in the Church, secular society was even more violently altered and disrupted by the Norman invasion beginning in 1169. By the mid 13th century various Norman families, still French in language, English in allegiance, had established themselves as overlords in different parts of the country. During the following century a balance of power was reached with the surviving native rulers, and the Norman lords outside the Pale gradually adjusted to their role in a foreign country, adopting the native language and

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1. W. O'Sullivan, *Celtica* VII 26.

customs, including the patronage of learning. This had now become the prerogative of secular hereditary learned families, usually with specialist functions: law or history or medicine or poetry. Most also wrote manuscripts, both for themselves and for their patrons. Other families concentrated on the scribal function, such as the Mac Fírbíse, who produced the Lecan family of manuscripts: the Yellow Book of Lecan (YBL), 14th century, mainly tales; the Leabhar Breac (LB), 15th century, mainly religious; the Great Book of Lecan (Lec.), 15th century, historical, genealogical and aetiological material. Manuscripts were highly prized. The 14th century owners of LU were able to use it and another manuscript to ransom some of their family, and in the next century the same family fought to retrieve them.<sup>1</sup> MS Laud 610, a religious and native miscellany written for a 15th century Norman patron, was used to ransom him.<sup>2</sup> The later manuscripts clearly derive much of their material from earlier ones. The Great Book of Lecan quotes thirteen other manuscripts, including Cín Dromma Snechtai and LL, as sources. Thurneysen has identified texts from CDS in two 16th century manuscripts, 23 N 10 and Egerton 88.<sup>3</sup> Several of the earlier secular manuscripts<sup>4</sup> even preserve the arrangement of monastic codices like LU.<sup>5</sup>

The origin of these learned families has been discussed by

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1. LU Dipl. Ed. Introd. ix-xi.
  2. M. Dillon, *Celtica* V 67.
  3. IHK p. 17.
  4. Lec., YBL; the Book of Ballymote (BB: 14th century; history, genealogy, dinnshenchus, tales).
  5. H. Oskamp, *Ériu* XXVI 113. For lists of the more important families and their MSS see J. Kenney, *Sources for the Early History of Ireland* (1929), pp. 20-1, 24-5.



Robin Flower<sup>1</sup> and more recently by P. Mac Cana.<sup>2</sup> Flower considered that they inherited the native tradition directly from the monasteries, and Mac Cana has investigated<sup>3</sup> how this heritage may have been passed down. Even after the reform of the church many of the Celtic monastic officials whose office had become hereditary, *erenaghs* and *coarbs*, still remained in possession of some of their old monastic lands, subject to a yearly payment to the bishop. Many of these had been men of learning, and some of the later learned families had branches who were also churchmen of this kind. The arrangement of secular manuscripts, the dispensing of hospitality by the learned families following the monastic duties of *erenaghs* and *coarbs*, and the use of the word scol, a borrowing of monastic Latin schola, to describe the later poetic schools, all show a continuum with monastic procedure. However this always involved mainly writing down and teaching, not the whole spectrum of native tradition.

The later learned families called filid were professional performers rather than academic scholars, and preserved customs which must be of native secular origin. They compose verse orally and in the dark.<sup>4</sup> Their powers of satire are still feared<sup>5</sup> and they consider themselves entitled to a bride's wedding clothes, a practice which also

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1. The Rise of the Bardic Order, *The Irish Tradition* ch. III.

2. The Rise of the Later Schools of Filidheacht, *Ériu* XXV 126-46.

3. p. 129 f.

4. O. Bergin, *Irish Bardic Poetry* pp. 6-10.

5. F. N. Robinson, *Satirists and Enchanters in Early Irish Literature* p. 127 n. 126.



appears in Sanskrit tradition.<sup>1</sup> They still go on circuit, visiting patrons in both Ireland and Scotland, and a new literary language, used for verse and prose compositions in both countries from the 13th to the 17th century, seems to have been developed by them. Like Old Irish it was at first probably orally maintained.<sup>2</sup> While the annalistic references to historians from the 9th century on usually refer to churchmen, the titles of fili, éices, and ollam are almost always given to scholars outside the monasteries, usually of provincial or national eminence.<sup>3</sup> If these are not isolated figures but men at the top of their profession, this implies a considerable subsidiary organization, and the absence of references to secular learned men in the preceding centuries need only show the lack of interest, or possibly lack of approval, of the church. The introduction of surnames means that two Munster families of filid can be traced back well before the 12th century changes.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, a late legal commentary on the privileges of the ollamh<sup>5</sup> includes the erenagh in the native order, but as one of the inferior grades. It is clear that the filid continued to exist, maintaining their pride and their oral learned functions, alongside the more academic learning of the Church.

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1. P. Mac Cana, 'An Archaism in Celtic Tradition', *Celtica* VIII (1968) 174-81.
  2. G. Murphy, *Duanaire Finn* III 190.
  3. K. Hughes, *Irish Scriptoria*, p. 267.
  4. Ó Cuill AFM 958, Mac Craith AI 1097: P. Mac Cana, *Ériu* XXV 137.
  5. Mac Cana, *Ériu* XXV 133.

However, like the other learned families, the later filid are specialists. They are now concerned almost entirely with the production of eulogistic verse, publicizing the worth and achievements of the patron, once the function of the lower order of bards. These later poems, composed with professional skill in the syllabic metres first cultivated by the Church, and often with a great show of native learning, were regularly written down for the patron in his family poem-book or duanaire. The author's name might be given there, but the filid do not seem to have acted as scribes themselves. However it also seems that they no longer told the native tales, and the status of storytelling has fallen much below that of poetry. A poem by a 13th century filí in the early Magauran duanaire<sup>1</sup> reproaches the patron for neglecting his craft while giving 'a horse to the timpán-players for telling Finn tales.' Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn, a 16th century filí, says he told tales to his patron and others, and was rewarded with a manuscript of tales, a horse, hound and harp<sup>2</sup>, but this was no formal recital but merely as they were settling down to sleep after a feast. He refers again to tales as 'soothing'<sup>3</sup>, and a 17th century poem also says that tales were told at sleeping time.<sup>4</sup> The colophon to a tale in a 15th century manuscript<sup>5</sup> says that St. Patrick ordered that no one should sleep or talk while it was being told (gan chodladh gan chomhrádh risin scél-so), which rather sounds as if such inattention was common.

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1. Poem VI §7.

2. Poem 27 p. 196 §10.

3. p. 93 §7.

4. Ériu VIII 192 l. 26.

5. Altram TDM §12.

The native tales quoted by the filid in their poems seem often to have been learnt from manuscripts<sup>1</sup> and the 13th century filí Maolmhuire Mac Craith says he read manuscripts at his poetic school.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, tales were still being written down in manuscripts. The mid 15th century Book of Fermoy, written for the Roche family of Norman origin, and the Book of Lismore, written, partly by one of their family of hereditary physicians, to celebrate the wedding of an early 16th century Mac Carthaigh Riabhach chieftain, both contain tales in nearly contemporary language, mostly on earlier native themes<sup>3</sup> sometimes mixed with Christian legend<sup>4</sup> as well as older texts. Many other tales on native and foreign themes seem to have been composed from the 13th century on, but have only survived in later manuscripts; the smaller paper manuscripts which replace the great vellum codices from the sixteenth century on. Many of these tales show the influence of continental romances, which were generally read aloud from a written text. This was probably the case in Ireland too; although there is no account of it the practice would have been familiar to the Normans. A set of 19th century manuscripts of romances in Maynooth is called Gadaidhe G  ar na Geamhoidhche 'The Cunning Filcher of Winter Nights' and a preface explains that the contents will make the time pass quickly for the reader and his audience. Other 19th century Munster manuscripts end each tale with a prayer for scribe and reader.

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1. e.g. Magauran Duanaire poem XXIV §13.

2. D  oghluim D  ana poem 104 § 7.

3. Fermoy: TDL I, EAC, T. Treblainne Lism.: Tromd. Guaire, Forb. DD.

4. Fermoy: Altram TDM, Lism.: ETC.



A. Bruford, who has made a special study of the later tales, thinks that many of these were written<sup>1</sup> 'by people who copied manuscripts themselves and learnt the language and style by so doing.'

The early Modern Irish romances were presumably intended to be read in chieftain's halls, but by the eighteenth century there were few aristocratic patrons left for tales in Irish, and the plantation of Ulster in the preceding century had put a stop to professional literary contact between Ireland and Scotland. The hereditary professional scribes and poets disappeared, though some later individuals were able to find patrons for manuscripts among amateur gentlemen scholars in Cork and Dublin. Irish had never been established as a spoken language in the towns, now dominated by the English ruling classes, and even in the country, where the two languages came in contact, was losing ground to English. However the last of the professional scribes in the 19th century were able to meet and collaborate with the first serious students of the early manuscripts, who began the work of editing and printing the native traditions for the modern enquirer.

However some of the native traditions still lived on among the Gaelic speakers. The common people of Ireland and Scotland must have always had their own oral tradition, apart from the learned literature cultivated by the aristocracy. A Middle Irish telling of the Christmas gospels<sup>2</sup> pictures the shepherds on the hills above

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1. 1966 p. 49.

2. Scéla na Soscél, ed. and tr. E. Hogan, RIA Todd VI (1895), from LB, § 74.

Bethlehem as 'some sleeping, some watching, some telling stories to each other (scélaigeacht), some singing and chanting, others frolicking and boasting (?) and humming, others whistling and telling anecdotes (stáraideacht).' Many international popular tales, or at least motifs which now form part of them, were current in early Ireland, to judge from incidents incorporated in the native literature. Doubtless many public recitations or readings of aristocratic tales in chiefs' halls and public assemblies reached a much wider audience, and many people, accustomed to using their memories in this way, would have been able to bring the framework of a tale they found interesting away with them. Bishop Carswell, prefacing his translation of Knox's liturgy, complains of the enthusiasm of people 'who write and support Gaelic' in 16th century Scotland for 'stories about the Tuatha Dé Danann and the sons of Míl and heroes and Finn Mac Coul and his men.'<sup>1</sup> At the end of the 17th century the traveller Martin Martin<sup>2</sup> says of Skye 'the natives have many stories of this general ('Fin-ma-Coul') and his army.' Bruford quotes<sup>3</sup> a mid eighteenth-century Irish account of 'natural bards' repeating to others 'the histories of ancient heroes and their transactions. Tales could have passed over at any time, though it is certainly the themes of the later romances; love quests, fights with monsters, magic; that would be most likely to be of general appeal, and the tales current orally in recent times are also those popular in late manuscripts. However Bruford thinks<sup>4</sup> that 'long before the end

1. Foirm na nUrmuidheach, ed. R. L. Thomson, Sc. Gal. Texts Soc. 1970, ll. 325-30.

2. 'A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland', ed. D. MacLeod, Stirling 1934, p. 206.

3. 1966 p. 59.

4. p. 61.

of the eighteenth century' most of the manuscript tales current in modern times had passed into oral tradition. His account<sup>1</sup> and bibliography of tales he studied<sup>2</sup> gives about twenty-five of these, some probably once current in all Gaelic-speaking areas, others with a definite Southern, or Northern, or local distribution.

This process was more complicated than simple popular retelling of stories heard among the aristocracy. Bruford<sup>3</sup> quotes an early 18th century Scottish account of an old Mac Mhuirich 'bard' who travelled round the Highlands and Islands reading to audiences from a manuscript. Later manuscripts are recorded as the prized possessions of ordinary people. From the mid-nineteenth century in Scotland, and rather later in Ireland, prose tales were being written down by collectors of Gaelic oral tradition. Several of their informants could refer to manuscripts once in circulation<sup>4</sup>, or from which they had learnt some of their tales; as reported by the son of Donacha Beag Ó Duinnín in Coolea (late 19th century)<sup>5</sup> and Hector Macleod in Uist (1871) whose father had looked after the now lost manuscript called Fear ón Ghairbhthír at the beginning of the 19th century.<sup>6</sup> Other tales in Scotland were also said to have been learnt from this manuscript.<sup>7</sup>

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1. p. 63.

2. pp. 250-67.

3. pp. 57, 60.

4. Bruford p. 66 n. 13.

5. G. Murphy, *Duanaire Finn* III, ITS XLIII, p. 154.

6. Bruford 1966 p. 61, and SGS X 158-61.

7. Bruford 1966 p. 105 n. 18, p. 153.



Most of the Irish evidence for reading aloud from manuscripts comes from 19th century Munster, and is quoted by Bruford.<sup>1</sup> S. O'Grady, in his introduction to his edition of TDG<sup>2</sup>, and an account by F. Keane, a Church of Ireland clergyman from Clare, tell how those who could read were eager to buy manuscripts, or borrow them for copying, either by themselves or by others better equipped. These manuscripts were then read in the farmhouses when people were gathered together in the evenings, and Keane mentions the prayer for the reader, found in late Munster manuscripts, in practice, the people replying Amen. Later, printed editions were used. Thus the literary language was still heard, although in most areas it had long been remote from ordinary speech, and influenced the quality of oral tradition. Not all tellers attempted to tell the manuscript tales, known in Ireland as fíannaidheacht, since they were generally longer and more complex than international popular tales.

Some of the people who cultivated oral storytelling were those to whom it was a useful skill. Travelling people, whether craftsmen or evicted tenants, could use storytelling as a suitable return for a night's lodging<sup>3</sup>, and boatman and carters could while away long journeys by telling tales, as well as learning others from their passengers. However most of the tellers whose stories have been collected in modern times have been small farmers and fishermen in isolated rural communities throughout the Gaelic-speaking area. J. F. Campbell's typical Hebridean informant was like Donald MacPhie,

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1. p. 56.

2. Oss III p. 29.

3. Bruford 1966 pp. 61-2, Delargy 1945 pp. 24-6.



who lived with his son and grandchildren in a one-roomed cottage in Iochdar, South Uist. People crossing the sound from Benbecula would call in on the old man, who seemed to have a version of almost all the long tales Campbell collected, some of them learnt from a neighbour.<sup>1</sup> Seán Ó Conaill (1853-1931) of Kerry had only once left his village in his life, to go to the local fair, and yet his stories filled a book.<sup>2</sup> His material had come from 27 different sources, of whom all but one were local, including another first-class storyteller, Seán Ó Sé. He had also heard readings from a printed book. Other areas rich in storytellers were Coolea, Co. Cork<sup>3</sup> and Cárna, Connemara. Seán Ó Briain of Cárna (1852-1934) according to the collector J. Delargy the best storyteller he ever met in Ireland<sup>4</sup> had over fifty tales, mostly long, learnt from his mother's brother and his father. Micheál Mac Donnchadha of Cárna, an expert on natural and family history in the area, learnt his tales from his father and from listening to the old men of the village on winter nights. In 19th century Scotland Alexander Mac Neill, an illiterate Barra fisherman, learnt his long tales from his father and many other old men<sup>5</sup>, while the most famous recent Scottish tellers were Duncan MacDonald of Peninerine, South Uist and Alexander MacLellan of Frobost, whose tales have been published in English as a book.<sup>6</sup>

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1. WHT I xxix.

2. LSÍC ed. S. Ó Duilearga 1948.

3. G. Murphy, *Duanaire Finn* III xxxvii, 154.

4. Beál. XXX 154.

5. WHT II 110, 137 etc.

6. *Stories from South Uist*, ed. J. L. Campbell (1961).

Men such as these had much other lore besides their long tales and were truly the professors of their communities. Their range reminded J. Delargy<sup>1</sup> of the 'omnibus collections of Irish vellum tradition' but it could also be compared with the repertoire of the early filid. Also although most must have cultivated their learning to provide a necessary intellectual satisfaction, especially accessible to those born in communities where the native traditions and language were still respected, there was clearly a strong hereditary element in the preservation of tales. As well as learning tales from their fathers, Seán Ó Conaill knew his family had lived in the same place for five generations before, Mícheál Mac Donnchadha knew his pedigree back for five generations, and Alexander MacNeill sang a Hogmanay song composed by his great great grandfather.<sup>2</sup> In some cases the teller's family can be traced back to some of the last professional men of learning.<sup>3</sup>

However in their total reliance on oral transmission the modern storytellers were more like the ancient filid, and the modern tradition should be able to shed some light upon the old. Most active tellers were conscious literary artists, emphasizing their words with voice and gestures.<sup>4</sup> No talk was allowed to interrupt the performance. Long tales were the most highly regarded both by teller and audience. Many over an hour in length have been recorded, and there are reports of

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1. 1945 p. 8.

2. Delargy 1945 pp. 9, 21; WHT III 381.

3. Delargy 1945 p. 23.

4. Delargy 1945 p. 16.

still longer tales in the past.<sup>1</sup> The tellers' memories were so highly trained that the best could remember a tale after one hearing - Seán Ó Conaill claims he had been capable of this since the age of twelve - and sometimes tell it word for word. S. O'Grady, in his edition of TDG, mentions a man who memorized OCU from the Gaelic Journal, and Seán Ó Conaill fifty years later still remembered as much of this printed tale as he had heard read in his youth.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Delargy 1945 pp. 21-2.

2. TDG Oss. p. 56, LSÍC xx.



## CHAPTER II

### The Tales

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## The Tales II

For most of the Gaelic tradition, up to the 19th century, one has to deduce the nature and function of storytelling from the narrative texts preserved in manuscripts. However for the early period there is another piece of evidence. One of the texts preserved in the Book of Leinster is a tract purporting to list tales the native fili ought to be able to tell. It begins:<sup>1</sup>

"Do nemthigud filed i scélaib agus i comgnib in so síis da n-asnís do rígaib agus fhlathib .i. vii. coícait scél .i. cóic coícait de prímscélaib agus dá coícait do fhoscélaib. Ocus ní hármíter na fosceóil-sin acht do chethri grádaib tantum .i. ollam agus anrath agus clí agus cano. Agus iss iat so na prímsceóil .i. Togla agus tána agus tochmarca, agus catha agus uatha agus immrama, agus oitte (.i. báis) agus fessa(ocus)forbassa, agus echtrada & aithid agus airrgne."

"Here below is concerning what gives the fili his status as regards stories and comgne for telling to kings and princes, that is, 350 tales; five fifties of chief tales and two fifties of subsidiary tales. And those subsidiary tales are ascribed to four grades only, that is, the ollamh, the anrath, the clí, and the cano. And the chief tales are these: devastations, cattle-raids, and wooings; battles, caves (?), and rowings-around; untimely deaths (that is, 'deaths'), feasts, (and) sieges, adventures elopements, and destructions."

and ends<sup>2</sup>:

"Ní fili nád chomgne comathar ná na scéla uile."

"He is not a fili who does not preserve comgne or all the tales."

There is another copy in a 16th century manuscript<sup>3</sup>, from which the

1. f. 189b, Dipl. Ed. 24917.

2. LL 25008.

3. TCD H<sub>3</sub> 17, ed. B. O'Looney PRIA I (1879) 215-250, referred to here as H.

reading comgnib above is taken (for comgnimaib 'joint deeds' LL).

This term will be discussed presently<sup>1a</sup> with reference to an article by S. mac Airt<sup>1</sup> whose interpretation<sup>2</sup> of the final sentence above I have followed.

The different groups of titles ('chief tales' only) are listed in order, followed by the titles of five groups reckoned 'as chief tales' amal phrimscéla: tomadma 'burstings forth', fisi 'visions', serca 'loves', sluagid 'hostings' and tochomlada 'migrations'. However the number of titles in each group is irregular, and even with the five extra groups the total (c.200) falls short of that specified.

There are also what appear to be two shorter versions of this list, one independent<sup>3</sup> and one included in the Senchas Már introduction<sup>4</sup>, which list the titles of the first four groups only and do not mention the five extra groups. The introduction to the independent version expands on the context of the tales:

"Dliged ollaman ocus aird-fíled ocus saer-senchaide .."

"The duty of the professor and the high-fili and the noble historian .."

and the stories are:

..."dá n-indisin a ndáledhaib ocus a n-oireachtasaib da rígaib ocus do ruirechaib ocus do rígdannaib, do thriataib ocus do tháisechaib ocus d' espugaib dá n-irrgairdiugad."

..."for telling in meetings and assemblies to kings and overkings and royal heirs, to lords and to chieftains and to bishops, to entertain them."

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1a. p.38.

1. Filidecht and Comgne, Ériu XVIII 139-152.

2. p. 142.

3. Edinburgh Advocates' Library ms. VII, ed. R. Thurneysen ZCP XIV 1.

4. AIL I 42-46.



Another long list appears in a Middle-Irish tale, Airecc Menman Uraird maic Coisse 'The stratagem of Uraird mac Coisse'<sup>1</sup>. The poet-hero Uraird mac Coisse, fili to the high-king Domnall mac Muirchertaig (+980), is unlawfully robbed by some of the king's relatives and seeks redress. The king asks him for a story, and he says he may choose any of the titles he names:

"Conad iarum ro-airmistair anmanna coimhghne ocus  
prímscélu nÉrenn, do neoch díb bátar mebra ndó do rádh",

"So that then he listed the names of the 'joint knowledge'  
and chief tales of Ireland, of those he remembered how to  
tell".

This list runs to 165 titles, of which the king chooses the last, 'The Destruction of Mael Milsothach's Fort', because he has not heard it before. This is in fact the poet's 'stratagem'; the new title is his own allegorical account of the wrongs he has suffered, which, when explained, provokes the king to action. This list, also thematically organized, contains some groups not in LL (comperta 'conceptions', buili 'frenzies') and omits others (Caves, Untimely deaths, Sieges). However it begins with a mixed group of gnáthscéla 'well-known tales' including one title from each of these missing groups. Most of the titles here would not fit into any of the established groups, which may be why they are gathered together separately. The order of groups, and the titles given, sometimes differ considerably from LL, though the latter part of the list (elopements, the five extra LL groups, destructions) has almost identical contents, but for additions.

R. Thurneysen, in his discussion of these lists and the titles they contain,<sup>2</sup> derives both A (LL etc.) and B (Airecc) from one 10th century original, with subsequent independent additions.

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1. Airecc §§ 3-8.

2. IHK pp. 22-24.



Many of the Gaelic texts in manuscripts have titles, usually appearing both as a heading, and as a colophon in the form Conid ... conicce sin 'So that that is ... up to there'. However, despite the high-king's statement that he had heard all the tales in the Airecc, extant titles are not very closely related to titles in the lists. Of about 268 tales named only 45 seem to be extant under the same title in MSS. or roughly one fifth of the total. Another fifth are probably extant under other headings. Enough other chief events or heroes can be identified, though little survives of the 'story', to arrange the titles into the four main 'cycles' of native tales established by modern scholars. This shows that the older cycles predominate - the heroic Ulster cycle and tales of early kings. There are not many mythological tales, in which the Celtic gods appear in magic rather than mythical adventures, and even fewer about the hunter-warrior Finn. This may show that the lists are older than the 10th century in origin, or simply that they reflect the traditionalism of the learned classes. Again, not all the thematic groupings of the Lists appear in the titles of extant tales, and some listed groups are much more frequent than others. Aithed, Serc, Sluagad, Tochomlad, Tomaidm and Uath are not used as titles of tales in manuscript, while Feis, Forbais, Longes, Orgain and Togail are rare. Only Aided, Cath, Echtra and Tochmarc are really common in MSS.<sup>1</sup>

Both lists put the tales firmly in an oral, secular context, though with churchmen included in the audience in the Edinburgh short version, and they show tales being told on special occasions (at tribal assemblies) as well as at the request of the patron. However the reason

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1. The bibliography of tale titles in the Appendix, though necessarily selective, nevertheless illustrates this point.

for grouping the tales according to theme is unclear, especially as it is not reflected in extant manuscript tradition. The organization of the lists has recently been discussed by H. Oskamp<sup>1</sup> and P. Mac Cana.<sup>2</sup> Oskamp considers the thematic grouping as the written product of early monastic (9th or 10th century) didactic treatment, supplanted in most of the later manuscripts by synchronic grouping, though he cites<sup>3</sup> 'the (partly lost) Tána in LU and the Immrama in YBL' as evidence for the earlier system. Many 8th and 9th century tales seem to have been recast by 11th century redactors, and titles could have been changed.

Mac Cana, however, accepts the suggestion of A. and B. Rees<sup>4</sup> that the thematic grouping reflects the pre-Christian oral function of the tales; as well as being told at gatherings, or for the patron, as the lists suggest, each category would be appropriate to a particular socially significant occasion. He cites as evidence the king Fergal asking for the battle-tales of Leinster to be recited to him and his men on the night before the Battle of Allen.<sup>5</sup> Two later tales, Aislinge Meic Conglinne and Altram Tige Dá Medar, give various occasions for storytelling when a particular type might be appropriate: at a wedding,<sup>6,7</sup> going into a new house,<sup>6,7</sup> bringing out ale,<sup>6</sup> taking an inheritance,<sup>6</sup> before going into battle,<sup>6</sup> or on a sea-journey,<sup>7</sup> or hunting,<sup>7</sup> or to hear judgement.<sup>7</sup> Both still regard tales as a suitable entertainment for

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1. Imr. CM introduction, p. 15.

2. Ét. Celt. XIII esp. p. 80.

3. n. 65.

4. The Celtic Heritage, Ch. X The Storyteller's Repertoire p. 210.

5. C. Almaine §8.

6. Aisl. MC I p. 113.

7. Altram TDM p. 204.

kings. Mac Cana accepts all the tale types of the lists as genuine and ancient, while the Rees brothers would add macgnímartha 'boyhood deeds' and dinnshenchas 'place name lore'. As well as being inserted at the appropriate point in written narratives, place name legends were also told in the appropriate situation. In one tale<sup>1</sup> the high-king on a circuit of Ireland has his 'historian and storyteller' (a shenchaidhi ocus a sceulaidhi) 'that is, Fiacha Fíli', with him to tell him the dinnshenchas of the places they come to, and there is another instance of dinnshenchas told on a journey in the Bórama.<sup>2</sup> The frame of the collection of Finn-cycle and other tales called Acallam na Senórach is also a journey around Ireland, during which the Finn-cycle hero Caelte tells St. Patrick the stories of the places they visit.

The significance of storytelling at particular times is deepened by the blessings promised by both Aisl. MC II and Altram TDM if the tale is recited on the occasions they mention: a newly-married couple will be fertile<sup>3,4</sup> and wealthy,<sup>3</sup> a new house will never have a corpse brought from it, be well-stocked, and never burn,<sup>3</sup> a new banqueting hall will be peaceable.<sup>4</sup> A king going into battle will be victorious,<sup>3</sup> a person going on a sea-journey will arrive safely and one going hunting or to have his case judged will be successful.<sup>4</sup> Aisl. MC also gives a general blessing, a 'year's protection' to the person to

1. Caithr. Congh. §XII.

2. §§ 67-69.

3. Aisl. MC II p. 113.

4. Altram TDM p. 204.



whom it is recited, and this virtue is also given in the Old Irish Triads<sup>1</sup> to Táin Bó Cualnge. As, again in a late tale,<sup>2</sup> a pig in the Otherworld is cooked when four true stories are told<sup>3</sup>; so all the early legends were probably held to have some intrinsic power. Scél, the regular word for a tale, can also mean a prophecy.<sup>4</sup> This sense of the sacred is transferred to the written text of Táin Bó Cualnge in LL<sup>5</sup>: 'A blessing on everyone who shall faithfully memorize the Táin as it is written here and shall not add any other form to it.' This is reminiscent of the ending of the Book of Revelations<sup>6</sup>, and indeed it is St. Patrick who declares the blessings of Altram Tige Dá Medar. Pagan and Christian notions seem to have come together: in a much later tale, Eachtra Léithín<sup>7</sup>, which includes the motif of the worst night, St. Ciarán is said to have ordained that if the tale were told during a storm the weather would clear.

If one accepts that the Lists refer, as they say, to oral recitation, the apparent lack of coherence with manuscript tradition becomes less perplexing. In particular, the occurrence of tales in manuscript under different titles from those of the lists is not surprising when one remembers that the scribe did not have to bear a particular occasion in view.

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1. § 62.

2. E. Chormaic § 40.

3. Many of these ideas can be paralleled in ancient Sanskrit tradition. M. Dillon PBA XXXIII (1948) 247-249.

4. Ch. V (a) ex. (6), p. 121.

5. l. 4919.

6. Ch. XXII 18-19.

7. Celtic Review X 143.

The inclusion of tale-list A in LL implies that it was not just an historic text but one with contemporary relevance<sup>1</sup> and in fact the thematic groups of the lists are referred to fairly frequently in Middle Irish and later texts. The 11th century dinnshenchas poem on Carman<sup>2</sup>, which gives a description of the native oenach or 'fair' held there, includes storytelling among the entertainments offered, quoting the alliterative beginning of List A: togla tána tochmarca 'destructions, cattle-raids, wooings'; as well as fessa 'feasts', and aitte oirgne 'untimely deaths, destructions'. This poem is the chief evidence for G. Murphy's view<sup>3</sup> that 'the fili .. probably told his tales at their best in the oénaige (fairs) where ... the arts of early Ireland seem to have received their fullest expression'. However the description is too clearly late and exaggerated to put such emphatic weight upon it.<sup>4</sup> A poem on Irish learning in Lebor Gabála<sup>5</sup> quotes na fessa ocus na foirfessa 'the feasts and the sieges', and Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn refers in a poem to tána tochmhairc toghla<sup>6</sup>. Togla agus tochmharca are recited by Finn's fili in a 16th century Finn-tale, Bruidhean Bheag na hAlmhaine<sup>7</sup>. The group of Bruidhean tales, of which the title combines the meanings of Togail bruidne 'razing of a hall' of the lists and another word bruidhean 'quarrel' was largely the product of the expansion of the Finn-cycle from the late Middle Irish period on, though bruidni are listed in the

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1. M. Dillon, *Seven Centuries of Irish Learning*, ed. B. Ó Cuív, p. 26.

2. Met. Dinds. III 2-24.

3. 1961 pp. 12-13.

4. D. Binchy *Ériu* XVIII 125.

5. XV § 4. (mistranslated)

6. ITS XXII poem 25 § 29.

7. LSS p. 19.



dinnshenchus of Carman, which includes Fiansruth Find 'the cycle of Finn and the Fianna' among the tales. Apart from Bruidhean, only Cath Aided (Uidheadh), Tochmarc, and Echtra of the Lists, and another addition Tóraidheacht 'pursuit', were actually used as titles of written tales in Early Modern Irish. The last two of these occasionally survive in oral tradition.<sup>1</sup>

There is clearer evidence for the continuation of the theory of the lists in practice in the compositions of the later filid. J. Carney<sup>2</sup> considers that the filid 'were never storytellers or entertainers, such a function would be very much beneath them.' If one accepts the theory of Mac Cana and the Rees brothers that storytelling, as well as providing aesthetic and intellectual enjoyment, could also at times have an almost ritual significance, it seems an appropriate part of the semi-supernatural powers of the men of learning. However Carney's next remarks are certainly relevant: 'They had to know Irish genealogy, Irish history and prehistory: they had to know so many stories that no situation could arise in their professional career but they would have a convenient analogy from the past to the present.' The 'bardic' poetry of the later filid, public verse composed for special occasions, regularly quotes parallels and sometimes tells a whole tale or urscéal as illustration. In the earlier poems these examples are almost always drawn from native tradition, despite the large amount of foreign material translated in the 11th century and later. The 14th-century poet Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh uses the

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1. A. Bruford 1966 pp. 170-171.

2. The Irish Bardic Poet (1967) p. 10.



triumphal return from exile of Conall Corc<sup>1</sup> in a poem urging his MacCarthy patron to lead his people back to Cashel<sup>2</sup>, while Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn tells the story of Airecc Menman Uraird meic Coisse in a poem reproaching his patron for refusing protection to the poet's kinsman during a punitive expedition.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes several tales are referred to. In elegies on the death of a patron, a thirteenth century fili in the Magauran Duanaire<sup>4</sup> mentions the deaths of Cobthach Coel, Eochaidh Aireamh, Conaire, Cormac Conlonges, Eilim, Muirchertach mac Erca and Diarmait mac Cerbhaill; and Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh<sup>5</sup> the deaths of Fothad Canann, Cú Ruí, Cuscraid Mend Macha, Diarmait Ó Duibhne, Muirchertach mac Erca, Dath Í and the sons of Tuireann. In each case analogous tragic deaths are recalled: in the first poem the subject was burnt to death in his hall, in the second killed in battle on a hill, as were the kings and heroes mentioned.<sup>6</sup> An aisling poem by Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn<sup>7</sup> refers to stories of an Otherworld woman and King Arthur, Murchadh mac Briain Bóramha, Aedh mac Ughaine, Cú Chulainn, Mathghamhain Ó Maille, the lads of Tailltiu in the time of Conaire, Bran, a king of Connacht, and Connla.<sup>8</sup> Although not all the tales here can be

1. PMLA LVI 937.

2. Dioghluim Dána poem 74.

3. Poem 3.

4. Poem IV.

5. Dioghluim Dána poem 64.

6. MS tales: Org DR, T. Étaíne (iii) § 21 ff, TBDD, BDC, (?), A. Muirchertaig, A. Dhiarmada; A. Fhothad Canainne (ZCP XX 400-4), ACR, (?), TDG, A. Nath Í (PRIA Ser. 2 II 172-3), OCT.

7. Poem 40.

8. MS tales: (?), Cog p. 172, (?), Serglige CC, (?), (?), Imr. Brain, Acall. 6361, (?), E. Chondla.

(?) in footnotes 6 and 8 means the reference cannot be identified with an extant tale.

identified, nor appear under one thematic title either in the tale-lists or in manuscripts, it is clear that the poet is drawing on some sort of thematic classification.

It is not clear what motivated the inclusion of particular titles in the lists. Some must be monastic additions: the group of innrama in List A, which I would agree with J. Carney<sup>1</sup> and D. Dumville is of monastic provenance<sup>2</sup>, and seems to replace the group of airgala 'conflicts', found in the shorter version; most of the tochomlada, which appear to be sections of the synthetic prehistory of Ireland put together in the monasteries, Lebor Gabála; and several translations from the classics which appear in List B.<sup>3</sup> Many other early tales in manuscripts were not included. P. Mac Cana has stated that he thinks the listed titles 'were not and were never intended to be a complete register' of tales<sup>4</sup>; but in answer to a query by H. Oskamp<sup>5</sup> has also said: 'it is not impossible that in some cases titles known from the lists of sagas or referred to in existing tales are "blank titles", that is, titles of never-written stories.' It is not made clear in what follows whether he or Oskamp took this to mean 'never written down', or 'never composed', though Oskamp thinks tales in the LL list must have existed in some form. The question is, what form. Various tales apparently

1. 1955 p. 294.

2. *Ériu* XXVII 74, 93-94.

3. Airecc §§ 3, 5.

4. *Ét. Celt.* XIII 80.

5. Imr. CM introduction p. 42 n.

included in the Lists, are extant only in much later language<sup>1</sup> and, like the earlier texts, often under different titles. Some modernizations of tales in manuscripts are clearly rewritings of the earlier written text, but in other cases are more like new compositions on the same theme.<sup>2</sup> There were clearly once variant versions of some of the most famous tales in early Irish manuscripts, before they were redacted into the surviving composite texts in the 11th century renaissance.<sup>3</sup> The number of listed tales appearing in manuscripts with different thematic titles, or in different genres of lore, reflect a fluid use of material. The inclusion in the Lists of different thematic titles apparently referring to the same story:

Aided Conchobair and Táin Bó Rois (A,A)<sup>4</sup>, Fís Chonchobair and Tochmarc Ferbe (AB,A)<sup>5</sup>, Forbais Fer Fálgae and Táin teóra n-Frc nEchdach (AB,A)<sup>6</sup>, Forbais Fer Fídgae and Tochomlad Cruithnech a Tracia co hÉirind (A,AB)<sup>7</sup>, Orgain Bélchon Bréfne and Togail Bruidne Bélchon Bréfne (AB,B)<sup>8</sup>,

strengthens the possibility that the Lists need not refer to established oral texts at all, but are suggestions for themes to be worked up by the filí as occasion demanded, from his general store of traditional learning.

1. BDC, C. Cumair, EAC, E. Chormaic, Forb. DD, TDL, TDG.

2. CRR, CMM, CMR.

3. TBC, TBDD, FB, Serglige CC.

4. A. Chonchobair.

5. T. Ferbe.

6. Forb. FF.

7. Extant as dindshenchus, Met. Dinds. III 164-166, or synthetic history: J. Todd, The Irish Nennius (Dublin 1948) § XXVII.

8. A. Cheit, Death Tales p.36.



Both the thematic lists refer as well as to stories to comgne, a term of elusive meaning.<sup>1</sup> The native glossators equate it with senchas 'historical knowledge' or synchronisms 'what king was contemporary with another.'<sup>2</sup> Mac Airt, accepting this explanation, and criticizing the idea that the fili's repertoire of tales was purely to entertain his patron, suggests that his main function was the exposition of the tales 'for example from the genealogical point of view.' Mac Airt does not see the oral tales, as preserved by the fili, as artistic narratives, but as reference material. However the radical meaning of comgne is 'joint knowledge', 'all embracing knowledge', and several texts refer to fer comcni cuimnech diambad eól freisnéis ocus aiséis ocus scélugid 'a man of comgne and good memory who is expert in refutation, exposition (or 'narration') and story-telling'.<sup>3</sup> It seems to me that comgne may well have once referred to the fili's basic stock of learning, from which, trained in oral recital, he could draw the plots for narrative tales.

Doubtless tales which were often called for might become fairly fixed in content and be learnt in that form by other tellers. In Cath Almaine<sup>4</sup> the king's druth 'jester' is able to tell him the listed, and extant, prímscéil; Orgain Dind Ríg. The tales which reached manuscripts probably are those which were popular and widely known. Of

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1. S. Mac Airt, Ériu XVIII 142.

2. O'Davoren § 347, SC § 363.

3. AIL I 18, Triads § 248, LU 9789.

4. § 8.

the foscéla 'subsidiary tales' which List A says were required of the four top grades of filid only, nothing more is known.

The thematic tale-lists suggest a system of oral performance of tales which must have continued parallel to the written records being made in manuscripts. However by the Middle Irish period the prestige of oral transmission, maintained by respect for tradition, must have been undermined by the existence of ancient versions of traditional material enshrined in the early manuscripts. The worldly cleric satirized in Aislinge Meic Con Glinne for his interest in secular literature does not keep the four famous prímscéla Táin Bó Cualnge, Togail Bruidne Da Derga, Tochmarc Étaíne and Tochmarc Emere in his head but in manuscripts concealed in his boots, and manuscripts were probably early found a useful source of information by the filid.<sup>1</sup>

The mixed initial group of gnáthscéla 'well-known tales' in List B seems to be an attempt to bridge the gap between the theory of the lists and the tales extant in manuscripts. Many of the titles do not fit into the older categories, but of 28 all but 5 are extant under the same title as written texts. They still reflect the traditional bias of the thematic lists however - all but two of the tales belong to the Ulster cycle.

Many of the titles listed are those of remscéla 'foretales' to TEDD and TBC, or subsidiary episodes of TBC. 15 of these episodes are listed in TBC I<sup>2</sup> as Dinda na Tána 'High Points of the Táin', and other titles appear as headings and colophons to episodes throughout

1. Aisl. MC II p. 124.

2. 2747.

the various versions of the text. There are two separate lists of the TBC remscéla; one which postulates twelve titles follows the remscél Fallsigud Tána Bó Cualnge<sup>1</sup>, the other, with fourteen titles, appears in the 14th century manuscript Stowe D42<sup>2</sup>, beginning Do remscéla na Tána .i. The three remscéla of Orgain Brudne Uí Dergae are listed in LU 8006, from Cín Dromma Snechtai. The original list of TBC remscéla may be equally old, since the 9th century Longes mac nUislenn, which now seems to provide one of the main causes of Ulster-Connaught hostility, does not appear in either version. (It appears in Lists A and B as an Elopement: Aithed Derdreann le maccaib Uislenn.)

Contrary to the opinion of Mac Cana<sup>3</sup>, it seems to me that the concept of 'cycles' of tales may not be 'modern' but may well be as old as the change of medium, from oral - for performance, to written - for reference. Certain cycles in the lists seem not to have been written down at all; tales dealing with the Ulster hero Fiamain<sup>4</sup>, or the 5th century Leinster princess Eithne Uathach<sup>5</sup>, though here there are references in the annals and other sources.<sup>6</sup> Some of the TBC remscéla are grouped together in LL, following the list, and the same manuscript has a collection of tales about the Ulster cycle poet Athirne.<sup>7</sup> Of the

1. LL 32901.

2. ed. K. Meyer, RC VI 191.

3. *Ét. Celt.* XIII 75.

4. Echtra Fiamain (A) Aithed Mugaine le Fiamain (A) Forbais (A) / Orgain (B) Dúin Binne, Aided Fiamain (A): see M. Dobbs, JCS II 45-46, 51.

5. Longes Eithne Uathaige (A, H<sub>3</sub>17 only), Tochmarc Eithne Uathaige (A), Cath Cille Osnaide (B).

6. Annals c. 487-90, B. Chiaráin tSaighir SG p. 9, Cóir Anmann §170.

7. LL 114b-118a.



tána of the thematic lists only those connected with TBC are extant, and these are grouped together with TBC in YBL.<sup>1</sup>

Táin Bó Cuailnge itself is of unusual length, and it seems likely that it already represents a compilation of earlier, shorter tales.<sup>2</sup> These may be indicated by the subtitles, and indeed compilation is also implied in the Story of the Finding of the Táin where (since a written version had been exchanged for Isidore's Etymologiae) the 7th century filid of Ireland said they only knew parts of the tale.<sup>3</sup> Episodes clearly added are Cú Chulainn's boyhood deeds: Macgnímartha Con Culainn, told as a flashback; and his fight with Fer Diad: Comrac Fir Diad, in later language than the rest of TBC I,<sup>4</sup> but listed as Aided Fhir Diad (A), and in early modern Irish extant again as a separate tale. The LL list of remscéla gives three further tales 'now told in the body of the Táin': Cú Chulainn's going to Culann's house, his getting arms and a chariot, and his going to Emain Macha, and these appear in the Macgnímartha. The process of combining earlier shorter tales into one written narrative continues in the later secular manuscripts. In Edinburgh MS LIII (Glenmasan, 15th century) several foretales to the Táin (OCU, Fochonn Loingse Fergus, TB Flidaise) are run together; and in Egerton 1782 (16th century) TBDD is run together with its remscél Tochmarc Étaíne.

The same process has obviously occurred in many other written narratives. In Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin (O.Ir.) several tales about

1. ff. 17-60.

2. IHK p. 96.

3. Falls. TBC LL 32881.

4. But for BMM.

this 7th century hero, including, it seems, the listed Serc Créde do Chanainn Mac Gartnáin (B) are combined into one narrative. King tales are combined in chronological order in the 11th century Bórama and Early Modern Irish Cath Maighe Léana, while Acallam na Sénorach and Feis Tighe Chonáin (E Mod Ir.) are collections of Finn cycle tales. Caithréim Conghail Chláiringnigh 'The Battle-career of flat-nailed Conghal' is an early Modern Irish collection of tales about an Ulster cycle hero, including possibly Aígidecht Artúir (A), Orgain Cathrach Boirche (A,B) of the lists.<sup>1</sup>

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1. M. Dobbs, JCS II 49, 54.

### CHAPTER III

#### The Style of Extant Tales

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## III

The Style of Extant Tales

As already mentioned, only about a fifth of the tales listed in the early tale lists are extant under the same title in manuscript, while about the same number seem to be preserved under different titles. There are many other early tales in manuscript which have to be identified as such by more subjective judgement; short, self-contained texts with a continuous narrative and a clear plot, often with individual titles and colophons. Some written versions of tale titles in the lists are much less clearly 'stories', and seem to preserve only the kernel of the presumed oral original.

The motive for the recording of native lore by monastic scribes is of course unknown. One practical reason would be if the monasteries were indeed teaching it to the heirs of their secular tenants, as suggested by Kathleen Hughes.<sup>1</sup> However the writing down of tales as such supposes an interest in this specific genre, whether they were regarded primarily as historical information or as artistic literature. There is little evidence of Christian interference with the contents of the tales. The Ulster heroes Conchubar and Cú Chulainn are provided with prophetic conversions before death in deliberately archaic form.<sup>2</sup> Native echtraí and monastic immrama

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<sup>1</sup>1966 pp.153-4.

<sup>2</sup>Ch.V, p.122.

both show a mixture of pagan and Christian ideas in their picture of the Otherworld.<sup>1</sup>

Otherwise additions seem confined to chronological comments and unintentional anachronisms<sup>2</sup>, or disapproving or explanatory colophons.<sup>3</sup> The Latin words et and dixit (and occasionally other words)<sup>4</sup> frequently appear in tales, but interchangeably with their Irish equivalents.

The basic medium of Gaelic narrative at all periods, from the earliest written records to the modern oral tradition, is prose. The Ulster cycle in particular gives an idealized picture of the love of honour and mighty deeds of the Irish warriors of old time, and such 'heroic' literature, found in many countries and languages, is generally in verse.<sup>5</sup>

Likewise verse, because its metrical shape makes it easier to remember, has often been presumed to antedate prose in all traditional literatures. The learning of the Gaulish druids was preserved in verse, according to Caesar<sup>6</sup>, and the same is true of the oldest Irish Laws.<sup>7</sup> D. Greene seems to think of the use of prose in secular

<sup>1</sup>Ch.VII bii, p.224.

<sup>2</sup>Sc.MMD §5,12.

<sup>3</sup>TBC II 4920, Serglige CC §49.

<sup>4</sup>C.Almaine §10.

<sup>5</sup>C.M. Bowra, *Heroic Poetry* (1964) 2-3.

<sup>6</sup>De Bello Gallico VI §14.3.

<sup>7</sup>D. Binchy, *PBA* 1943.



narrative as an innovation by monastic redactors. In speaking of Aibgitir Chrábaid, an early eighth century text on the Christian life<sup>1</sup> he says "The overwhelmingly important thing about it is precisely that it is in prose, for the ordinary rhythms of speech had no place in the traditional chanting and no doubt appeared remarkably vulgar and uncultivated to literary men". As he points out, the prose tales 'continued for a long time to be ornamented with passages in rhythmical or metrical patterns', and these passages have been regarded as survivals (either actually, or in their form) of the more 'ancient' medium. Bowra<sup>2</sup> quotes the older narrative poem in the late T.Ferbe II.<sup>3</sup>

However in early tales such passages are usually speeches by the characters. M. Dillon has described the 'form of the Irish epic tradition' as 'a prose narrative with occasional passages of verse, the verse being used for dialogue to mark any heightening of the mood: love, anger, death'<sup>4</sup>. The same form appears at one stage of Sanskrit narrative tradition. At first only the speech-poems are recorded, then they are set in a fixed prose context, and at length the whole tale is told in unbroken verse. It seems the verse and prose form may be the ancestor of narrative verse in cultures

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<sup>1</sup>A View of the Irish Language ed. E. Ó Cuív p.15f.

<sup>2</sup>Heroic Poetry p.15.

<sup>3</sup>1.766.

<sup>4</sup>PBA XXXIII (1947) 253.



where this develops. G.S. Kirk<sup>1</sup> accepts the 'possibility of an intermediary prose saga tradition' in early Greece, which could have transmitted information about the Mycenaean age to the Homeric verse-makers, and may have had 'considerable thematic and even verbal fixity'. K. O'Nolan<sup>2</sup> goes further, suggesting that fixed language, notably epithets, encouraged the change from prose to verse.

The existence of the prose and verse form in early Gaelic oral narrative seems to be accepted by most writers on the subject<sup>3</sup>, though the language of written prose can rarely be older than the 8th century. Either the Gaelic tales are not as old as has been thought<sup>4</sup> or the wording was not fixed in oral tradition, or has been deliberately altered for writing. Many early written texts do not contain any verse, and the prose is usually very bare and concise, with abrupt transitions in the narrative and very little background information or explanation. S. Mac Airt attributes this 'bald staccato style' to the filid, who, he thinks, regarded the tales chiefly as history.<sup>5</sup> H. Oskamp attributes this view to

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<sup>1</sup>The Songs of Homer pp.96, 108ff, 120

<sup>2</sup>Homer and Irish Heroic Narrative, Classical Quarterly XIX (1969) 6.

<sup>3</sup>P. Mac Cana, Ériu XXIII 116.

<sup>4</sup>J. Carney 1955 pp.276-7.

<sup>5</sup>Ériu XVIII 151 n.

the monastic scholars.<sup>1</sup> J. Delargy,<sup>2</sup> pointing out that the shortness of these written tales would not have earned them much respect from a modern oral teller, suggests that they are summaries for a teller to expand in recitation. This view was accepted by M. Dillon<sup>3</sup> 'the form was given by the fili in actual performance and was his personal achievement.' G. Murphy however, basing his argument on some tales told more fully at the beginning than the end,<sup>4</sup> considered that the tales were written down as 'interesting specimens of genuine storytelling' by monastic scribes from the recitation of secular learned tellers. Any abbreviation resulted from 'the growing weariness of the reciter' as experienced by any collector of oral narrative before the introduction of recording machines.<sup>5</sup>

P. Mac Cana<sup>6</sup> has discussed in detail the form of various vernacular texts believed to have been in Cín Dromma Snechta, which, from its age, probably represents their first redaction in writing. These show a considerable range of style, from passages of archaic rhythmic

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<sup>1</sup>Ériu XXVI 113.

<sup>2</sup>1945 p 32.

<sup>3</sup>Cycles of the Kings p 2.

<sup>4</sup>Sc. Cano, TBC I, Sc. MMD.

<sup>5</sup>1961 pp 7-10.

<sup>6</sup>Ériu XXIII 107-111.



speech with a minimum of introductory prose<sup>1</sup> to concise prose with short unvaried sentences and reported dialogue<sup>2</sup> to similar prose with longer, more diverse sentence forms, occasional direct speech, and in some examples verse as well.<sup>3</sup> The first two types suppose a previous, no doubt oral, tradition, from which they have been abstracted, (both these titles are in the Lists) while in his view the accomplished narrative artistry of the third type gives no indication that they are retellings of anything else. The two types recorded from oral tradition suggest possible different motives<sup>4</sup> and/or sources for the written texts. Compert Con Culainn preserves the plot of the tale with little regard for verbal artistry, Forbais Fer Falgae the artistic high-points of the tale 'no doubt ... constants even in oral recital' with knowledge of the plot assumed.<sup>5</sup> While any storyteller, or intelligent member of his audience, might have known the basic plot of a tale, the archaic language of the ancient speech-poems was probably only known to, and jealously guarded by, the most learned practitioners of tales - the filid. The informants need not have been different people from the redactors. Many of the native learned classes, or their aristocratic audiences, must have joined

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<sup>1</sup>Forb.FF, op.cit p.108.

<sup>2</sup>Compert CC, op.cit. p.109.

<sup>3</sup>Imr.Brain, E.Chondla.

<sup>4</sup>See also M.Dillon, *Modern Philology* XLIII p 17 col 1.

<sup>5</sup>P. mac Cana, op.cit. p.113.



the church and become themselves teachers or scribes, able to write from their own recollection.

Opinions vary as to whether narrative artistry appearing in early written tales is oral and secular or written and monastic. G. Murphy held that 'the type of storytelling which we see imperfectly reflected in medieval manuscripts is on the whole that of the fili'<sup>1</sup>; S. Mac Airt, 'Insofar as our knowledge extends to the development of saga, it would appear that the monastic scholars were almost solely responsible for the literary treatment of the tales'<sup>2</sup>. Other views depend on the prose narrative of tales not being fixed in oral recital. Mac Cana<sup>3</sup> sees oral prose as 'a relatively simple and flexible medium' extended in narration with the typical oral stylistic features of<sup>4</sup> 'alliteration, repetition, description and dialogue.' In the functional prose used for recording Compert Con Culainn these elements were removed, and the basic medium consciously moulded by redactors into a literary style. G. Mac Eóin<sup>5</sup> sees the written tales as 'meant for a reading rather than a listening public.' 'Each telling of a tale could vary in phrasing, and to some extent in incident. It would have

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<sup>1</sup>1961 p 12.

<sup>2</sup>Ériu XVIII 151.

<sup>3</sup>p 116.

<sup>4</sup>p 109.

<sup>5</sup>Studia Hibernica V (1962) 244-91.

been pointless to record any one recital of a tale, for the next telling could have differed considerably within the limits allowed. The short sagas seem to be the result of an attempt to achieve an artistically satisfying form based on the invariable elements of the tales. For this end dialogue, descriptions, and other such matter was included.<sup>1</sup>

Dialogue in direct speech, and descriptive passages, become as much part of classical Old Irish storytelling as the verses. In Middle Irish alliteration and repetition also become common in manuscript tales. Dialogue, description, and verses will be dealt with in subsequent chapters, and I will concentrate here on the prose narrative of the tales.

### Old Irish

The stark narrative of the earliest written tales may well be introduced by an example from Mac Cana's first text, Compert Con Culainn, where the Ulstermen bring home the child born in the Otherworld mound.<sup>2</sup>

- (1) "Totháegat iar sin do Emain. Alair leu  
a mmac combu blaice. Da fúabair galar  
iar suidiu. Atbail de. Ferthair a gubae.  
Ba mór a saeth la Deichtine díth a daltai"  
"After that they come to Emain. Their boy  
is reared by them until he was an infant.

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<sup>1</sup>p 245.

<sup>2</sup>4.





Disease assails him after that. He dies of it. His lament is uttered. The loss of her fosterchild was a great grief to Deichtine."

Not all the sentences are as short as this, but Mac Cana regards the lack of connectives as a typical written feature. The alternation of past and present tense is frequent in the early tales. The same style appears in other tales, such as Cath Maige Mucrim:<sup>1</sup>

- (2) "Tíagait a ndís aidchi shamna issin tilaig. Anaid Ailill is tilaig. Baí Ferchess frie anechtair. Do·fuitt didiu cotlud for Ailill ic costecht fri fogilt na cethrae. Do·llotar asint síd ocus Éogabul mac Durgabuil rí int sída ina ndíaid ocus Áine ingen Éogabuil ocus timpán créda ina láim oca sheinm dó ara bélaib."

"The two men go on Samhain night to the knoll. Ailill stays on the knoll. Ferches was on the outskirts nearby. Sleep falls on Ailill while listening to the cattle grazing. They came out of the Otherworld mound with Éogabul son of Durgabul king of the mound after them, and Áine Éogabul's daughter with a tin timpán in her hand playing it to him before him."

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<sup>1</sup>I }3.



The final sentence here is longer, and linked by connectives. Mac Cana points out this type of sentence as the ending of a tale, and thinks it is probably a device from oral storytelling.<sup>1</sup> It is regularly used in manuscript tales to round off a paragraph.

Deliberate artistry often appears most clearly in the opening lines of these concisely told tales, such as Longes Mac nUislenn:<sup>2</sup>

- (3) "Bátar Ulaid oc ól i taig Fheidlimthi meic Daill scélaige Conchobuir. Baí dano ben ind Fheidlimthi oc airiuc don tšluag ósa cind is sí torrach. Tairmchell corn ocus cuibrend ocus rolásat gáir mesca"

"The Ulstermen were drinking in the house of Feidlimid mac Daill, Conchobar's storyteller. That Feidlimid's wife was waiting on the company and she was pregnant. Horns and cups were circulating, and the men put forth a drunken din"

Sentences without a finite verb, like tairmchell - cuibrend, are often used in description in prose tales and in poetry - a device, Mac Cana thinks, specially cultivated by the redactors of the written literature.<sup>3</sup>

A further example of a tale-opening follows two

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<sup>1</sup>p 112. (Ériu XXIII).

<sup>2</sup>Lg 1.

<sup>3</sup>p 109.

parallel sentences with the long rounding-off sentence mentioned already:<sup>1</sup>

- (4) "Boí Cobthach Coel Breg mac Úgaine Móir i rríge Breg. Baí dano Loegaire Lorc mac Úgaine i rríge Laigen. Ba formtech Cobthach fri Loegaire im ríge Laigen, corra gaib sergg ocus galar de, coro shergg a fhuil ocus a fheóil de, conid de roboí Coel Breg fair-siom; ocus ní roacht marbad in Loegaire."

"Cobthach Coel Breg son of Úgaine Mór was king of Bregia. Loegaire Lorc son of Úgaine then was king of Leinster. Cobthach was jealous of Loegaire about the kingship of Leinster, so that he developed decay and sickness from it, so that his blood and flesh wasted from him, so that from that he was called the 'Thin One of Bregia'; and had not succeeded in killing Loegaire."

The use of the definite article, in these last two examples with the name of a character, seems to be a matter of style (a weak demonstrative) rather than grammar. The use of past and present tenses, which often seems arbitrary, appears more carefully planned in the events following the last three examples - Ferchess' attacking the Otherworld company, the rising up of the Ulstermen at the scream of Feidlimid's unborn child, and

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<sup>1</sup>Orgain Dind Ríg {1.



Cobthach's murder of Loegaire, are all told in the historic present. The last example shows further features - explanation of a name (Cobthach Coel Breg), and the alliterative phrase fuil ocus feóil. On the other hand, the prose style is clearly basically the same as in Compert CC. This continues with the appearance of the god Lug to Deichtine: conaccae ní, in fer 'she saw something, a man ...'; a common introduction to description of a character in later tales; and Lug tells her the purpose of his visit in a long series of connected clauses. The most strange thing about the prose of Compert CC is that the words of Lug and the other characters are in reported speech, which is otherwise very rare at any stage of Gaelic literature.

The laconic style of early Irish narrative often covers deliberate understatement and irony. In TBC I, in Cú Chulainn's Boyhood Deeds, the youthful hero enters a battlefield armed only with his 'driving club' for playing games. Menaced by a supernatural, he strikes off its head with the club, and 'begins to drive a ball across the plain' except that no ball has been mentioned and it must be the head.<sup>1</sup> In the same tale, where the wargoddesses terrorize the army with their shrieking, the text adds each time the dry comment Nírbo hísin adaig ba sámam dóib 'That was not the quietest night for them'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>1.502.

<sup>2</sup>11.210, 3944, 4305.



The language of hospitality is often used ironically, as in the climax of Longes mac nUislenn, where the sons of Uisliu return to Conchobar's court and:<sup>1</sup>

"Feraid Éogan fáilti friu la béim forgama  
do gaí mór i nNoísin co rroímid a druim  
triit;"

"Éogan welcomed them with the thrust of a  
great spear into Noíse, so that his back  
broke right through."

In Scéla Mucce Meic Da Thó the enraged warriors of Ulster and Connacht spill out of the banqueting hall to hew each other the better<sup>2</sup>: co rralsat so imól for lár ind liss 'so that they made a good drinking-round in the middle of the courtyard'. Earlier on, when they first arrive, the text comments: Niptar aigthi carat im fleid 'They were not the faces of friends at a feast',<sup>3</sup> and this expression is used again in later tales.<sup>4</sup> Some of the ironic comments on fighting are used so regularly that I have listed them together under battle-descriptions.<sup>5</sup>

In a few early tales the feeling for language also extends to puns. In Echtra Chondla much of the pagan/Christian ambience of the tale depends on the Otherworld

<sup>1</sup>{ 15.

<sup>2</sup>{ 18.

<sup>3</sup>{ 5

<sup>4</sup>Cog. p 175, ECRI p 188, Gaithréim Cellacháin Caisil ed. A. Bugge } 77.

<sup>5</sup>See also K. Meyer IT II (ii) 14-15.

woman's ambiguous information as to her origins: she comes from the lands of the living where there is no death or sin but an everlasting feast síd mór i taam conid de suidib nonn-ainmnigther aés síde. Síd means both 'Otherworld mound' and 'peace',<sup>1</sup> so that they live 'in a great mound' or 'in great peace', and thence are called the 'People of the Mounds' or the 'People of peace'. A grim pun, somewhat corrupted in transmission, closes Aided Fergus meic Roig<sup>2</sup> where the blind Lugaid casts a spear at Fergus, and asks whether it has hit: 'Is fír on,' ar cach, 'atát bruindi Fergus'. '"Truly', said everyone, "it is (?) the breast/end of Fergus."<sup>3</sup> Other examples are less important to the tale as a whole, for instance the line in Mesca Ulad<sup>4</sup> where Mutti iarom in cath for Érnú ocus ní érnai acht trian díb ass 'The Érainn were defeated in the battle and only a third of them escaped.'<sup>5</sup>

Traditional Lore in tales: name explanations, proverbs, triads.

Explanations of place and personal names, as in ex. (4) above, are characteristic of Gaelic manuscript narrative of all periods, as well as being collected

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<sup>1</sup>J. Pokorny ZCP XVII 193.

<sup>2</sup>{3.

<sup>3</sup>J. Carney 1955 p 14 n.1.

<sup>4</sup>1025 LU.

<sup>5</sup>Érnú is the accusative case of the plural tribal name Érainn, -érnai the prototonic 3rd singular preterite of as-roinni 'escapes'.



together in the Dindshenchus and Cóir Anmann. The origin of the name is either quoted, or more often arises from events in the tale itself. Many tales contain an episode where a series of places are named from events on a journey of some kind, such as the rampage of the victorious bull, Donn Cuailnge, at the end of the Táin, leaving the Findbennach's liver at Crúachna Ae (áe liver), his loin at Athlone (Áth Luain 'ford of the loin'), his haunch at Port Láirge (port of a thigh), and rib cage at Dublin (Áth Cliath 'ford of the hurdles').<sup>1</sup> This theme forms the framework of the Acallam, as well as appearing inside it.<sup>2</sup> Some of the name explanations are based on puns, so that the baby which screamed in its mother's womb<sup>3</sup> (ro derdrestar) is named Derdriu by the druid. Minor characters such as retainers are often given names which allude to the job they do, such as three charioteers called Cul, Frecul, Forcul, sons of Sídbi and Cuing: 'Chariot, ?chariot and ?chariot, sons of Chariot-pole and Yoke.'<sup>4</sup> Although most common in Early Irish<sup>5</sup> this practice continues much later.<sup>6</sup> Some of the sets of names become virtually stereotyped: Drícht, Delt, ocus Dathen 'Dew,

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<sup>1</sup> TBC II 4901-14, (I 4145-55), also 1759-64, 1789 (1534 I); Marbad Cúil Duib 1.17, CML §20.

<sup>2</sup> 1.4435f.

<sup>3</sup> Le §5.

<sup>4</sup> See D. Greene 1972 p 67; TBDD §113.

<sup>5</sup> TBDD §103ff, TBC I 2814f.

<sup>6</sup> Erchoitmed Ingine Guilde §7; Forb. DD §§10, 12, 21, 23, 34; BC §20. See p. 342 below.



?(a river name) and Light'<sup>1</sup>.

Proverbs and proverbial phrases are also frequent in Gaelic narrative, both as quotations (often in direct speech) and when their origin is described. Large numbers of proverbial phrases, some very old, used for impossible or useless things are often grouped together in descriptions of fighting;<sup>2</sup> while favourite proverbs like Is aithe cach ndelg as ó 'The younger thorn is the sharper',<sup>3</sup> and Is buaine bládh na saegul 'Fame is more lasting than life',<sup>4</sup>; (variant: Beó duine d'éis a anma,\* 'A man is alive after his soul, but not after his honour';<sup>5</sup>) appear in many tales of widely differing dates.<sup>6</sup>

Another kind of native lore that regularly appears in manuscript tales, as well as in an Old Irish, semi-legal collection, is the triad. Some of these, for instance the 'three waves of Ireland', appear in many tales<sup>7</sup>; others, like the three treasures of Síd Cruachan brought out in Echtra Nerai<sup>8</sup>, the three pests of Ulster to be removed by Celtchar as an éric for killing Blai

<sup>1</sup>TBC I 1943, TBDD {107, CMT (i) {65.

<sup>2</sup>Ch.VIII pp. 277-280.

<sup>3</sup>Esnada Tige Buchet {3, (one MS, an alteration by a later scribe? D.Greene 1955 p 43 l.505n.), Marbad Cúil Duib l.14, Acall. l.1385.

<sup>4</sup>A.Fhinn II {40, ACC II {13, TDL I {10, Caithr.Congh.p.94, Imth.Aen. 2820.

<sup>5</sup>Fog.CC {55, BC {31. \* agus ní beó d'éis a oinigh.

<sup>6</sup>O'Rahilly {304, 134.

<sup>7</sup>CRR I {16, Acall. 7995, CML {70.

<sup>8</sup>{9, 19.

Briugaid<sup>1</sup>, and the three wonders of a battle<sup>2</sup> concern events in the particular tale. Triads are also used for description, as in the opening of Immram Curaig Ua Corra where the briughaid father of the three heroes keeps his house constantly supplied with three cries - of those preparing drink and those cooking food in the cauldrons and the warriors playing fidchell; and three sacks - of malt, wheat, and salt to flavour the food. Sometimes an event in a tale is compared with, or made the third member of a triad. In TBC<sup>3</sup> Sualtam asks whether the noise he hears is the sky bursting or the sea covering the land, the earth splitting, or the cry of his son Cú Chulainn fighting against odds. In TBDD<sup>4</sup> a noise which makes the hall shake may be the earth splitting, or Leviathan encircling the world thrashing its tail (a piece of monastic lore) or the boat of the raiders reaching land. Often these references are to famous events in other native tales. The earliest example is in TBC I, where<sup>5</sup> Cú Chulainn's enumeration of the Men of Ireland is one of a triad with Lug's numbering of the Fomóiri in Cath Maige Tuired, and Ingcél's numbering of Conaire's host in Togail Bruidne Da Derga. The tales referred to remain the

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<sup>1</sup>A. Blaf Briugad } 7.

<sup>2</sup>C. Almáine } 23, FDG 1.925.

<sup>3</sup>I 3415.

<sup>4</sup>} 56.

<sup>5</sup>A gloss, 1.327 LU; in text Eg. 1782.



same throughout the written literature. Conall's ride avenging Cú Chulainn<sup>1</sup> is grouped with horserides by Lug in CMT and Subaltach in TBC; in Cath Fimtrágha<sup>2</sup> a feat is grouped with Lug's at CMT and Cú Chulainn's at Tailltiu; in Tóraigheacht Taise Taoibhghile<sup>3</sup> Oscar's deeds are likened to the triad of Lug against the Fomóiri, Cú Chulainn against the men of Ireland, and Conall Cernach's 'deargruathar' avenging Cú Chulainn.<sup>4</sup>

It is difficult to evaluate the status of this lore in the tales. Origin legends for names, time-honoured sayings, and triadic groupings all seem part of general traditional learning, even though in manuscripts they occur mainly in separate collections. Some tales show more of it than others. (Name explanations:<sup>5</sup>) Sometimes the name-explanations are hardly relevant to the tale in which they occur, like the digression on the origin of the name 'Plain of Pig-counting' in the battle-tale CMM.<sup>6</sup> Other explanations are pseudo-etymological rather than legendary, such as that of Fand ingen Aeda

<sup>1</sup>ACC II §45.

<sup>2</sup>1.384.

<sup>3</sup>1.7145.

<sup>4</sup>See also BCC (LSS) p 8, ECRI p 88.

<sup>5</sup>CMM I personal names §§3,41,43; place-names §§5,13,34, 58,73; CMT (i) place-names §§15,34,35,37,38,43,49,54; TBC I passim.

<sup>6</sup>I §§34-7.



Abrat in Serglige Con Culainn<sup>1</sup> 'that is, "Aed" is fire. The pupil is the fire of the eye. "Fand" is the name of the tear which comes across it'<sup>2</sup>. Recurring proverbs and proverbial phrases, some of which survive to modern oral tradition, must also be an authentic part of native lore, though particularly popular in Middle Irish narrative. However those said to have originated in a particular tale often do not occur anywhere else,<sup>3</sup> and one might wonder whether some of them are the result of a stylistic affectation of the storyteller.<sup>4</sup> Some of the triads are clearly ad hoc inventions, while others in tales are rather academic quotations from the written collection: Sepainn side a trédhi fora nemithir cruitiri dóib .i. suantraigi ocus genntraigis ocus golltraigi 'He played the three strains for which a harper gets his status to them, that is, sleep music and smiling music and weeping music'.<sup>5</sup> G. Murphy,<sup>6</sup> talking about Cath Maighe Tured (ii), speaks of its 'museum arrangement' and 'tendency to record stray scraps of lore.' It is clear that sometimes

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<sup>1</sup> } 16.

<sup>2</sup> See also TBC I 310 cúa; TBDD } 64 bruden (longer account in LU than in YBL).

<sup>3</sup> O'Rahilly 1921 pp 127-8.

<sup>4</sup> cf. J. Carney 1955 p 172 n.1 'It is my impression that "proverbs" are often invented to give a particular flavour to a tale.'

<sup>5</sup> CMT (ii) } 164.

<sup>6</sup> 1961 p 21.

these must be interpolations, of which some examples have already been pointed out in the footnotes. In the fragment of TBC I in LU five place-names and one personal name explanation, and two triads, have been added as glosses by the two scribes, including the triad quoted above and incorporated in the text in later manuscripts. Such additions could perhaps be explained as an attempt to supply all the background information which a trained fili might be expected to know if he were questioned. This interest in lore seems especially characteristic of scribes in the Middle Irish period.

#### Middle Irish

Many of the Old Irish tales first written down in the 8th and 9th centuries were copied and recopied almost without alteration in manuscripts, and thus preserved to the present day. Meanwhile the language was changing, inflections were being lost and the verbal system simplified. Obsolete forms in the tales were sporadically modernized and the spelling brought into line with contemporary practice, but in general the scribes seem to have been concerned to preserve the antiquity of the text they had received. That the main interest in the ancient written tales was as the embodiment of ancient tradition is shown even more clearly in the texts compiled from several earlier written versions in the 11th century.<sup>1</sup> No information is discarded, so that these tales (which only survive in compiled form) are full of doublets of

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<sup>1</sup>TBC I, TBDD, FB, Serglige CC, CMT (ii), IRK p 25.



episodes or acknowledged alternatives.<sup>1</sup> Variant versions of the tale are referred to as slicht 'track'.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes variants are ascribed to the learned (éolaig), which could mean secular filid<sup>3</sup> but in general other references to manuscripts (libair) show that mainly written sources were used. This habit of quoting authorities is maintained in later pseudo-historical texts.<sup>4</sup>

There is clear evidence of a different approach to written narrative in the Middle Irish period in several tales appearing in the Book of Leinster. These are Táin Bó Cualnge (II) Mesca Ulad (II) and Cath Ruis na Rígh (I). TBC II seems to be based on an earlier written version like TBC I, and the same may be assumed of MU II; though neither it nor the earlier version is complete, and there is little overlap. CRR I is the earliest known version of this tale, a sequel to TBC. All three are full, polished, smoothly connected narratives, without doublets of episodes or variant versions.

Conversations between the characters were regularly told in direct speech in Old Irish tales: 'indeed, the best known tales of the period consist of a more or less continuous interweave of narrative and dialogue.'<sup>5</sup> In the LL tales the use of direct speech, generally more wordy

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<sup>1</sup>FE §§41,77; Serglige CC p x; TBC I v. TBC II xvii-xxiii.

<sup>2</sup>TBC I 825,873 etc., T.Emere §§61,67.

<sup>3</sup>T.Étaíne iii §22; TBDD (LU) §8; TB Flidhaise II CR IV 218.

<sup>4</sup>Cog. 166,168,176,186,188; CMR II 150,248,252 etc.

<sup>5</sup>P. Mac Cana, Ériu XXIII 109.



than reported dialogue, is further extended. In TBC II characterization not in the earlier version is provided in remarks by the characters<sup>1</sup>, and the naming of places en route is made to depend on a remark by the 'Men of Ireland.'<sup>2</sup> In MU II the plot is carried forward by the conversations and suggestions of the characters.<sup>3</sup> The forceful personality of the Connaught queen Medb is emphasized in all three tales.

The language of narrative is much fuller and more ornate than in earlier written tales. Alliteration is very common, often linking near-synonyms; and words and phrases are rhythmically arranged, often in groups of three:<sup>4</sup>

- (5) "Tingsetar glinni cecht ar n-af dib cu barbarda,  
 7 ba sed barbardacht na comérgi co mbaf  
 nónbór i ngonaib 7 nónbór i fuilib 7  
 nónbúr ra hulibásaib eturru leth for  
 leth. At-racht Sencha mac Ailella 7 ba-  
 rocroth in craib sídamail Senchada comba-  
 taf tastadach for Ultaib."

"The guarantors of each of them performed  
 their duty savagely, and such was the  
 savagery of the general uprising that

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<sup>1</sup>A. de Paor, *Ériu* IX 122 (4), 123(3), 127 (3)-(6).

<sup>2</sup>TBC II xlvii.

<sup>3</sup>MU xxi-ii.

<sup>4</sup>MU II 11.115-20. A. de Paor *Ériu* IX 130-1, 133, 135.

between them there were nine men wounded and nine men injured and nine men wholly dead on each side. Sencha son of Ailill stood up and shook the peaceful branch of Sencha, so that the Ulstermen were silent and mute."

However, as soon as one looks in detail at the language of the tales, it becomes apparent that it is a mixture of archaisms and contemporary Middle Irish forms.<sup>1</sup> The confusion of preverbs and the creation of artificial deuterotonic verbal forms is characteristic of all three tales: an extraordinary example is da-ong-sa mo bréthir<sup>2</sup>.

### Repetition

Repetition is also cultivated as part of the narrative style. Messages are repeated verbatim to successive characters<sup>3</sup>. Dialogue is also repeated for more formal effects:

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<sup>1</sup>Craib shows accusative singular inflection, but the dative and not accusative plural follows the preposition ri (O.Ir. fri); the neuter pronoun sed refers to barbardacht f.; and cechtar, genitive singular masculine, causes nasalization. The Old Irish t-preterite at-racht occurs here, but ra-érig elsewhere in MU II (222,504,851); while tincsetar shows deponent and s-preterite endings, and the ro infixed in fo.crotha is meaningless.

<sup>2</sup>MU II 181, see Ch.IV p 92, from tongid, unless for do.tong. M.O'Daly, Ériu XIV 126-131, MU XXX.

<sup>3</sup>TBC II 1719-21 and 1724-6, 1874-80 and 1887-93, 3099-4008 and 4023-32; CRR I §§17,19.



for emphasis in the threefold prophecy of Fedelm<sup>1</sup>, and the asseverations of the Ulstermen<sup>2</sup>; and to bind together the episode Fule Cethirn in TBC<sup>3</sup>, or the sections on the approach of the Ulstermen<sup>4</sup> with their pattern of description and identification of individual warriors. Elsewhere also similar scenes are told in similar words.<sup>5</sup>

However this technique, common in international popular tales, also appears in rudimentary form in the earlier literature. Linking passages in a series of descriptions in repeated language in TBC II, MU II, have assumed this form in the older tales which share this feature;<sup>6</sup> and a repeated introduction or conclusion is also used to give coherence to frame-tales or episodes.<sup>7</sup> The dramatic device of threefold repetition of an incident, common in International Popular Tales, also appears in Old Irish: the cooling of Cú Chulainn's battle-fury in three vats of cold water<sup>8</sup>; Néde's three journeys back to Scot-

<sup>1</sup>TBC II 204f.

<sup>2</sup>MU II 279-84.

<sup>3</sup>II 3664f.

<sup>4</sup>TBC II 4291f., MU II 1.523f.

<sup>5</sup>TBC II 4668-70 and 4683-5; MU II 58-76 and 89-105; CRR I §§3,15 (verbatim), §§16,35,49. TBC II xivii-viii.

<sup>6</sup>TBC I, TBDD.

<sup>7</sup>TBC I Macgnímartha ll 537,605,822, A.Fíngéin §§2-11, Sc.MMD §§11-14, Acall. ll 610,870,1061,7758, FTC (Oss) p 128f.

<sup>8</sup>TBC I 815; but also in other Ulster Cycle tales: Serglige CC §36, FB §54.



land for information;<sup>1</sup> Eochaid Airem's three games of fidchell with Midir.<sup>2</sup> In some written tales events are said to have happened three times, but the actual telling of the repeats is omitted.<sup>3</sup> However in Fled Bricrend, which deals with the rivalry of three Ulster heroes, all the events take place in triplicate. The fight with a giant<sup>4</sup> is told in similar but not identical words, referring to the time before: toracht Conall Cernach in sligid cétna '... Conall Cernach came by the same route'; amal ro theich Loegaire 'as Loegaire had fled.'<sup>5</sup> In the section where the three warriors are described, the linking passage, an inquiry by Medb, is abbreviated the second and third times with 7rl. 'and so on.' After this she craftily presents each one with a precious cup, pretending he is the champion.<sup>6</sup> Loegaire Buadach is welcomed, told he is suitable for the Champion's Portion and the 'kingship of the warriors of Ireland', offered a bronze cup with a bird of white bronze on its bottom, and instructed to show it in Conchobhar's Red Branch hall as a sign of his supremacy. Given his cup full of special wine he drinks it in one, Medb saying it is a 'champion's

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<sup>1</sup>Immacall. §iv.

<sup>2</sup>T.Étaíne (iii) §§3-5, a recurrent motif in later tales.

<sup>3</sup>Fing.Rónáin 1.115.

<sup>4</sup>§§38-40 (LU).

<sup>5</sup>§39.

<sup>6</sup>§§58-62.

feast' for him and wishing him wealth and long life.

Conall Cernach comes next, but this episode is abbreviated (in LU) to:

- (6) "Fo chen a Chonaill Chernaig' ol Medb, 'is comadas cauradmír .7r. 7 cuach findruini dano 7 én óir fora lár .7r.' Iar suidiu dano iarom doberar do Conall 7 a lán do fín .7r."

The presentation to Cú Chulainn is told in the same words as before but with extra details, as quite often in three-fold repetition. The linking passage between the many descriptions of warriors in TBDD is also abbreviated to a series of cues after the first example. The passage includes a prophecy of the deeds of each man in the ensuing battle, but after a few of these have been fulfilled the narrative is cut short with the comment<sup>1</sup> that it is 'excess of narration' to tell the same things twice. Thus exact repetition was familiar to earlier redactors of tales, but the group of tales in LL is unusual in giving the text again in full.

Thurneysen<sup>2</sup> postulates a single redactor for the three tales, and A. de Paor<sup>3</sup> gives a list of common linguistic and stylistic features, in support of the view that 'the word-for-word similarities are ... too

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<sup>1</sup>152, LU only, 1.7913.

<sup>2</sup>IHK p 33.

<sup>3</sup>op cit. pp 143-6.(Ériu IX).



striking to be explained as a mere correspondence in taste between two contemporaries<sup>1</sup>. This redactor was seen as a seminal influence on later Irish prose<sup>2</sup>. This view may well have to be modified<sup>3</sup>; but in general the personality of the redactor is less important than his chosen style, a strange mixture of archaism and rhetoric. He did not invent the alliterative style, which appears in some passages in TBC I<sup>4</sup>, as does the rhythmic grouping of phrases in threes.<sup>5</sup> Some of the phrases selected by her for comment appear in other unconnected texts: the supernatural posture with one leg, one arm, one eye; the spectres on the battlefield; Cú Chulainn's tricolour hair; the servants and their music; the press of the battlefield.<sup>6</sup> Sencha stands up and shakes his branch as in the example above in many Ulster tales.<sup>7</sup> TBC II has a colophon (presumably the work of the redactor, since the scribe of LL has his own adverse comments to make) which offers a blessing to anyone who memorizes this written version unchanged - presumably for recitation, since the manuscript tradition was by now well

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<sup>1</sup>p 118.

<sup>2</sup>IHK p 33, A.de Paor p 146.

<sup>3</sup>C.O'Rahilly, *Ériu* XX 106. G.Mac Eóin, ZCP XXVII 76f.

<sup>4</sup>IHK p 113, A.de Paor p 146.

<sup>5</sup>A.de Paor pp 131-2.

<sup>6</sup>See Ch. VIff; pp.184,263,200,233f.,265.

<sup>7</sup>CRR I {52, FB {29, A.Guill & Gairb {47.



established.<sup>1</sup> In creating this fixed text for his contemporaries he incorporated many linguistic forms characteristic of the earlier written version; and, since he was so conservative in this respect, it seems unlikely that the apparent sudden change in narrative should be a complete innovation. It seems likely to me that he was drawing on established developments in oral recitation only partly reflected in earlier written tales.

### Early Modern and later written Irish

Later written tales continue the development of a sonorous, repetitive, ornamental and longwinded style; clearly designed to be heard rather than read; as in the story of Suibhne Geilt<sup>2</sup>:

- (7) "O'd chuala trá Suibhne sesdán na sochaidhe  
7 muirn an mórshluaigh nostógbaidh uime  
asin mbile re fraisnéllaibh na firmaiminti  
ós mullaighibh gacha maighni 7 ós fheigi  
gacha ferainn."

"When then Suibhne heard the shout of the  
multitude and the clamour of the mighty  
host he raises himself out of the great  
tree towards the showery clouds of the  
firmament, over the tops of every place  
and the ridge of every land."

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<sup>1</sup>TBC II 4919.

<sup>2</sup>B. Shuibhne } 17.

The sentences (connected mainly with ocus 'and') become a great deal longer; the following example, in which the children of the wizard Cailitín create magic armies to avenge their father on Cú Chulainn, is less than half the 'sentence'<sup>1</sup>:

- (8) "...7 do buailidar for férgrian na faitchi  
fíruane da chaithimh ina timcheall, cor  
dealbatar cathbuidhne commóra do sluagaib  
7 do sochraidhibh do gasánaibh siubhlacha  
sanaigi 7 do bolgánaibh buaidhirta bélceó  
7 do duillebar dathálainn dairbri..."

"... and they settled on the grassy gravel  
of the very green lawn to use it up around  
them, so that they formed equally-big  
battle-companies of hosts and multitudes  
of the fluttering sprigs of sanaig and of  
agitated puff balls and of the beautifully-  
coloured leaves of the oakwood..."

This scene is repeated in similar words later on in the tale<sup>2</sup>. Repetition continues to be used as a stylistic device in Early Modern Irish; both for short comments<sup>3</sup>, and longer episodes. In Cath Chrionna<sup>4</sup> Lughaidh Lágha has to kill three men before he gets the head of

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<sup>1</sup>ACC II §12.

<sup>2</sup>§§15, 20.

<sup>3</sup>BC §18, CF 11.815, 850.

<sup>4</sup>SG pp 322-3.



the real king of Ulster; while in Tromdam Guaire<sup>1</sup> the coming of an extraordinary desire to one of the poet-company, the telling of it to king Guaire, and his seeking help from his half-brother Marbán to satisfy his guests, is repeated four times almost word for word. In a much later tale, Guireadh Mhaoil Uí Mhanannáin, Maol's account of his husbandry provokes repeated comment from Fionn; and the failure of three of Fionn's men to catch Maol's pig is told in the same words each time<sup>2</sup>.

Many alliterative pairs of synonyms, like sluagh and sochaide or sochraide in exx (7) and (8), become almost formulaic in the later manuscript tales, from Acallam na Senórach (12th century) until the end of the written tradition. Examples of this feature, which he considers as part of traditional oral narration, have been collected by K.O'Nolan<sup>3</sup>; both of nouns (including cath ocus comhlann 'battle and conflict',<sup>4</sup> gail ocus gaisceadh 'valour and heroism',<sup>5</sup> maithe ocus móruaisle 'quality and great nobles')<sup>6</sup>; and of adjectives (including láidir lán-chalma 'strong valiant', rígda romór

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<sup>1</sup>11.304-599.

<sup>2</sup>Lia Fáil III pp 91-2, 99-101.

<sup>3</sup>Homer and Irish Heroic Narrative, Classical Quarterly XIX (1969) 10-13.

<sup>4</sup>Acall., A.Fhinn II, BCC, BBA, TGD.

<sup>5</sup>Acall., BCC, TGD.

<sup>6</sup>Acall., ECCR, BCC, BBA, TGD.



'royal, very great')<sup>1</sup>, which can also be used as adverbs. Pairs of synonymous verbs also occur<sup>2</sup>:

- (9) "Sgreadus agus sgréachus an t-aitheach go h-uathmhar aigmhéil & go neimhneach naimhdighe ó neimh an chréacht & an álaídh"

"The giant shrieked and screamed horribly, dreadfully, and venomously, hostilely, from the pain of the injury and the wound."

As well as providing a rich alliterative sound this repetitive style would also give an audience a double chance to catch at the meaning.

The narrative is also extended by the rhetorical use of emphasizing sentences with the copula to introduce every new action:

- (10) "Is é richt a ndeachaidh, a richt eóin ar eittillaig..."

"This is the form in which she (Badb) came: in the shape of a fluttering bird"

"Is and sin do innsaigetar Cú Chulainn 7 is amlaid do bí sé 7 a chloidimh 'na láim dírih deis..."

"It is then that they approached Cú Chulainn and it is thus he was, with his sword in his straight right hand..."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>BBA, TGD, Acall., A.Fhinn II.

<sup>2</sup>BEBD p 68.

<sup>3</sup>ACC II §§42,43.

In some tales almost every paragraph begins with Is and sin.<sup>1</sup> Other rhetorical paragraph openers in Early Modern Irish are ciodh trá acht 'what then but', acht atá ní cheana 'but there is something more', which can reach huge concentrations in the later tales.<sup>2</sup> The second appears in TBC II.<sup>3</sup> In dialogue each new speaker is also amply signalled<sup>4</sup>:

"Do labair airdrí Ghréc in tráth sin ocus  
is é ro ráid..."

"Then the high-king of Greece spoke and  
this is what he said..."

However, early Modern Irish tales also maintain the show of archaism cultivated by the redactor of Táin Bó Cualnge in LL and other Middle Irish writers.<sup>5</sup> Some even draw on the Old Irish tales in manuscript, like Tochmarc Treblainne, which follows Táin Bó Fraích almost word for word in some passages.<sup>6</sup> Bás Cearbhaill agus Farbhlaíde, which attaches itself to the Tochmarc Étaíne cycle<sup>7</sup>, affects in parts the short jerky sentences of Old Irish narrative:

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<sup>1</sup>Acall. 4606ff. BCL.

<sup>2</sup>ENC 21/20 times, TTT 16/29 times, ERL 12/19 times.

<sup>3</sup>439,1709.

<sup>4</sup>TGD p 70.

<sup>5</sup>eg. J.Carney 1955 p 168 n.

<sup>6</sup>J.Carney 1955 pp 212-3.

<sup>7</sup>6.



(11) "Musccclus an rí faromh agus iarras fidh-  
chiollacht ar Cherbhall. Imrit diph-  
lionuiph. Robhaoi cos Cherbhuill tar-  
san bfithchill anunn. Robhaoi Farbh-  
laidh abfus."

"The king woke up afterwards and asked  
Cerbhall to play fidhchell. They play  
together. Cerbhall's leg was over the  
fidhchell on the far side. Farbhlaidh  
was on this side."

The historic present is used sporadically in many of the  
tales, apparently for deliberate effect; as when Cear-  
bhall is brought out of prison<sup>1</sup>, or coloured birds settle  
on the Otherworld apple tree.<sup>2</sup> It appears fairly regular-  
ly with particular verbs, such as téit 'he goes/went'. In  
other cases the s-preterite ending (as in exx (9),(11)  
above) is used instead of the past forms with do (general-  
ized from older ro, do, no) to suggest rapid action.<sup>3</sup>

The majority of early Modern Irish tales have no use  
for early Irish brevity, and in these individual archaic  
forms contrast strangely with the rest of the narrative.  
Infix pronouns are introduced, often artificially, as  
in ex. (12a), and sometimes with little meaning: (12b)

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<sup>1</sup>BCF §42.

<sup>2</sup>ETC p 352.

<sup>3</sup>A.Bruford 1966 p 33, BCF §§8,10,12,35,41.



(12)a "Ní fes doibhsium cia bás ruc iat; in dáine ro ort, nó in támh nó teidm ros tromdithig"

"It was not known to them what death had seized them, whether people had slain, or plague or pestilence had heavily destroyed them"<sup>1</sup>

b "Ros labhair go faoilidh ffor-  
fhoisdineach fris 7 is eadh ro ráidh"  
"He spoke (it?) to him pleasantly,  
with true composure, and this is what  
he said"<sup>2</sup>

Fil appears with the accusative (nasalizing) in Coimh-easgar na gCuradh: Fil damhna n-oile againn 'We have another suitable person'.<sup>3</sup> as well as in Echtra Thaidhg: ní fhuil én nduine ann 'there is no one there'.<sup>4</sup>

Obsolete gender forms are used, such as the feminine form of 'three': do thoirbheir teóro póg dhó go díl 7 go díochra 'she gave him three kisses lovingly and earnestly'.<sup>5</sup>

Archaism in Early Modern Irish prose is seen by

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<sup>1</sup> ETC p 345.

<sup>2</sup> TTT 1.925.

<sup>3</sup> CNC p 55.

<sup>4</sup> ETC p 350.

<sup>5</sup> BEBD p 77; Tromd.Guaire xii, FTC ix.

S. Mac Airt<sup>1</sup> as a stagnant feature, an indication of the greater literary cultivation of verse. It could equally well be seen as a deliberate attempt to maintain the old tradition. In contrast to the earlier written literature, however, it seems that the wording of Romantic tales was altered freely by scribes in manuscript transmission. Manuscripts of Eachtra Chloinne Rígh na hIoruaidhe tell the same story in different words.<sup>2</sup> Manuscripts of Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil and Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair diverge 'not merely in words but also in the actual nature and order of the incidents related.'<sup>3</sup> Tóraidheacht Dhiarmada agus Gráinne, and Feis Tighe Chonáin are available in print in southern and northern versions.<sup>4</sup>

Other characteristics of Early Modern Irish narrative probably derive from the nature of the tales. The later tales are much longer than the earlier, not only because of their fuller style, but also their more diffuse plots, often tracing a series of adventures of several characters rather than one or two. A conventional paragraph opening, when the scene changes from one character to another, is dála 'meetings' or iomthúsa 'adventures,' ie. 'concerning', with the name of the new subject. Some tales use one or other of these, others both,

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<sup>1</sup>Seven Centuries of Irish Learning ed. B.Ó Cuív, ch.VIII 108.

<sup>2</sup>ITS I.

<sup>3</sup>ITS X vi.

<sup>4</sup>TDG, Oss. and ITS; FTC, MMIS and Oss.



again often with great frequency.<sup>1</sup> Iomthása appears in TBC I and II. Frequently there is an intale told by one of the characters as well,<sup>2</sup> often beginning with one of the conventional openings of a tale.<sup>3</sup> The Boyhood Deeds of Cú Chulainn, told in flashback in TBC, are an early example of this. It seems unlikely that such long narratives were ever intended to be recited from memory. Many tales address the reader: a léagthCóir;<sup>4</sup> or refer back to earlier passages with remhráidhte 'aforementioned', or amal adubhramar 'as we have said'.<sup>5</sup>

#### Modern oral Irish and Scottish Gaelic

The passing of the Romantic tales into oral tradition from the 15th century onwards has been charted in detail by Alan Bruford.<sup>6</sup> Changes in the content of the story; usually to make the sequence of events more coherent and logical, and thus easier to remember; generally result in shorter tales of four or five episodes, with a reduced cast list; and in-tales, especially those introduced as 'flashback', either told in chronological order or omitted. Tales with the same hero may be combined, or tales of native heroes may be combined with

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<sup>1</sup>CNC 11/15, TTT 26/22; Caithr. Thoir 14/34, ENC 4/22.

<sup>2</sup>A.Fhinn II }6, TDG Oss. pp 112,122.

<sup>3</sup>Ch. XI pp 348-352.

<sup>4</sup>CNC p 62, TGG pp 22,68, TDG ITS p 30.

<sup>5</sup>ENC pp 32,68,91,117,119,152; B.Suibhne } }13,49; CMR II pp 98,100,108 SgR.

<sup>6</sup>1966, chs. 15-19.



international popular tales. International wonder tales<sup>1</sup> were grouped with native tales by Irish tellers as fiannafocht, and both types share the same narrative style in Ireland and in Scotland.

The basic narrative is usually flowing and colloquial, as in folktales in other languages. The story of Critheagla gan Eagla,<sup>2</sup> begins:

(13) "Bhí rí i nÉirinn fadó agus bhí mac aige, agus b'é an t-ainm a bhí ar an mac Crith-eagla gan Eagla. Nuair a bhí sé bliain is fiche d'aois, bhuail sé amach, agus thug sé a aghaidh ar an bhfaraige go ndeacha ar bhruach na trághadh. Tháinig curachán snámh aige isteach ón mhuir thréach agus gan innti ach aon fhear amháin."

"There was a king in Ireland once and he had a son and the son's name was Fright without Fear. When he was twenty one years old he set forth and faced himself towards the ocean till he reached the brink of the ebb. A floating coracle came in from the rough<sup>3</sup> sea with only one man in it."

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<sup>1</sup>AT 300-749.

<sup>2</sup>ZCP XIX 137, Galway Finn-tale + AT 1950, see p. 152.

<sup>3</sup>Narrator's interpretation, p.136 n.

Emphasizing sentences, which here introduce the heroes' names, and the use of the qualified negative are regular features of the style: Ní dhearna sé ach éirghe as neart a chuid fola agus a ghoil isteach air úrlar an ghrianáin. 'He rose up with the strength of his blood and his valour inside onto the bower floor.'<sup>1</sup> In Scotland rhetorical questions also appear: Agus gu dé a chunnaic e dol seachad air ach fiadh agus cabar óir agus cabar airgid air 'And what did he see go past but a deer with a gold antler and a silver antler.'<sup>2</sup>; or Có bu mhoiche bh'air a ghlùn aig leabaidh an rìgh ach gaisgeoch na sgiatha deirge 'Who was earliest on his knee by the king's bed but the Knight of the Red Shield?.'<sup>3</sup>

Repetition is also used. The following example, from an Irish oral tale based on Eachtra Chonail Ghulbain,<sup>4</sup> shows the heroine carrying out instructions already given her by the hero; in a pattern of short sentences followed by a longer reminiscent of Old Irish narrative:

- (14) "Shíl sí a dhúiseacht. Chinn uirthé.  
Tharraing sí an ribe gruaige a bhí ar  
mhullach a chinn. Níor dhúisigh sin é.  
Bhain sí ladhraicín na coise de. Níor  
dhúisigh sin é. Bhuail sí dhe'n leic

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<sup>1</sup>Béal.XV 145 Ubhall Óir, Micheál mac Donnchadha 1930 Galway.

<sup>2</sup>DGP, Sg.D p 17.

<sup>3</sup>EIA WHT II 483, also pp 476,477.

<sup>4</sup>LML p 33, Seán Ó Briain; see A.Bruford 1966 p 242.



ós cionn a chroidhe é gur chuir sé trí  
uain d'fhuil a chroidhe amach agus níor  
dhúisigh sin é"

"She tried to wake him. She did not  
succeed. She pulled the lock of hair  
that was on the top of his head. That  
did not wake him. She struck off his  
little toe. That did not wake him.  
She struck him over the heart with the  
stone so that he vomited three frothings  
of his heart's blood and that did not wake  
him."

Repetition of incident and wording, often threefold,  
occurs throughout many oral tales, of native literary  
and international origin.<sup>1</sup> There is also rhythmic  
repetition of phrases: Siod a mach gabhaidh Murchadh,  
siod a mach gabhaidh Donnchadh, agus siod a mach gabh-  
aidh Brian Bòrr an athair 'nan déigh 'Out there goes  
Murchadh, out there goes Donnchadh and out there goes  
Brian Bòrr(amha) their father behind them.'<sup>2</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup>eg. Deirdire = Lg, John Mac Néill, Scottish: Maghach  
Colgar = BC, WHT II 179-86 (Alexander Mac Néill),  
Fionnladh Choinneachan Skye TGSI V (1875) 19; Irish:  
Ubhall Óir Béal. XV (1930) 141 (Micheál mac Donnchadha),  
(non-international wonder tales) Radharc an Chroidhe  
Mhóir AT 706 + Kerry Béal.III ( 1931 ) 74.

<sup>2</sup>DGP, WHT II 22.



example<sup>1</sup> appears to use the manuscript device of the historic present, though in Scottish Gaelic this tense-form is more often used for the future.

Nevertheless, as might be expected, there is a considerable literary influence on the language of Gaelic oral tales. Antithesis is combined with alliterating adjectives, as in manuscript tales, in Deirdire,<sup>2</sup> on the results of a journey:

(15) "Bha iomadh òg ghaisgeach aig an robh ceum luthmhor leumnaidh luaineach aig am falbh, aig an robh ceum fann failneach fiaraidh a' ruighinn, aig faidead an astair agus gairbhead na slighe"

"There was many a young warrior of energetic, bounding, frisky step when he set forth, who was of weak faint drooping step on arrival; from the greatness of the distance and the roughness of the way."

Pairs of synonyms, often linked by alliteration, are used; though not in such great concentration as in the manuscript tales: ag fiadhach agus ag foghaileir-eacht 'hunting and fowling';<sup>3</sup> cath nò cruadh-chomhrag

<sup>1</sup>Repeated, p. 223.

<sup>2</sup>p 42.

<sup>3</sup>LML p 90.

'battle or hard fight'<sup>1</sup> (Irish); dealbh agus dreach<sup>2</sup> 'form and feature'; sithinn agus sealg 'venery and hunting'.<sup>3</sup> The second of these is common, the fourth also appears in DGP as told by Donnchadh mac Dhomhnaill.<sup>4</sup> J.F. Campbell comments on the version of EIA<sup>5</sup> that the language is typical of Highland tales:

"Words all but synonymous and beginning with the same letter or one like it are strung together, there are strange names for the heroes, roundabout phrases to express simple ideas, and words used which are seldom heard in conversation and which are hard to translate."

The language of storytelling used a far wider vocabulary than that of ordinary conversation, and preserved many learned expressions from the manuscript tradition, e.g. Scottish drochaid for trícha cet,<sup>6</sup> or Irish pille for fidhchille.<sup>7</sup> Archaic forms include trí tiura póg in the Scottish Deirdire<sup>8</sup>, and atracht in a

<sup>1</sup>Béal. IV 199.

<sup>2</sup>Deirdire pp 78,84.

<sup>3</sup>EIA, WHT II 470.

<sup>4</sup>Sg.D pp 23,24,26.

<sup>5</sup>WHT II 467.

<sup>6</sup>A.Matheson, Éigse VIII (1957) 255.

<sup>7</sup>A.Bruford 1966 p 171.

<sup>8</sup>pp 8,56.



Kerry description of a storm at sea.<sup>1</sup> I wonder if the muir thréach of ex. (13) were not really the Muir Thécht 'congealed sea' common in manuscript romantic tales.<sup>2</sup>

The old words preserved by the tellers, though often not understood even by them,<sup>3</sup> earned great respect from the audience: as an informant told J. Delargy<sup>4</sup> 'they had such fine hard Irish you would not understand a word from them!' The wide literary vocabulary used was an integral part of the longer tales, witness the Scottish tradition that two of them (EIA and ECG) had been invented long ago by two ministers to try the powers of the Gaelic language.<sup>5</sup> One of G. Murphy's informants in Coolea<sup>6</sup> refused to tell two tales inherited from his father (BCL, BCC) as, though he remembered the plots, he had forgotten the language. Other tellers<sup>7</sup> could be highly critical of what they considered as badly-told tales, as indeed so could their audiences.<sup>8</sup> It seems some tales were preserved in oral tradition

<sup>1</sup> A. Bruford 1966 p 190

<sup>2</sup> TGG pp 20,126; TTT p xiii l.5485. P.80 above.

<sup>3</sup> WHT I Introd. p lix; Béal.II (1930) 26, V (1935) 98.

<sup>4</sup> 1945 p 33.

<sup>5</sup> WHT III 186

<sup>6</sup> Duanaire Finn III xxxvii {4.

<sup>7</sup> Delargy 1945 p 24; Deirdire pp 4-7 (Alexander Mac Néill).

<sup>8</sup> Delargy 1945 p 7



especially because they were difficult to tell<sup>1</sup>, and many passages in the Scottish oral versions of Eachtra an Cheithearnaigh Chaoilriabhaigh can be elucidated by reference to the manuscripts.<sup>2</sup> In general these are passages of heightened language, over which it seems special care was taken.

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<sup>1</sup>CCR and CIG, A.Bruford 1966 p 64.

<sup>2</sup>A.Bruford,SGS XIV 133-54.

CHAPTER IVDirect Speech

1. Conversation p.88.
2. Dialogue Conventions p.89.
3. Characterization p.97.
4. Dramatization p.100.
5. "Literary" Dialogue p.105.
6. Summary of the Development p.108.

### Direct Speech    IV

Conversation in direct speech is a constant feature of Gaelic story-telling, appearing even in Old Irish tales which otherwise contain no description and no verse, and whose narrative is often so concise as to give the impression of a summary. This impression is doubtless an oversimplification, and in fact most of the apparent gaps in sense in the early literature can be filled in from a knowledge of its social and mythological conventions. Later tales and versions fill out the narrative, and add or include poems, or descriptions largely composed of formulaic phrases. Direct speech, however, changes little throughout the tradition, remaining characteristically terse and to the point where it appears in tales, and indeed on the lips of modern Gaelic speakers. Direct speech in the tales seems to be firmly based on the conventions of ordinary conversation, and in Old Irish has been taken by scholars as representative of the early language as actually spoken.

#### Dialogue Conventions

Throughout the literature, when two characters meet, they naturally greet each other. An unknown visitor is usually asked to identify himself, a gesture of plain dealing ominous to refuse. In early tales the interrogative used is often not 'who' but 'whose', clearly requesting his family background; as in Serglige §12:

(1a) "'Cóich thussu?' ol iat.    'Messi Oengus mac Aeda Abrat,'  
ol sé."

"'Whose are you?' said they.    'I am Oengus son of Aed Abrat,' said he."



In TDD §3 the king asks the beautiful woman found by the spring, where she comes from as well:

- (1b) "'Cest, can duit ocus can do luid?', ol Eochaid. 'Ní ansa,' ol sí. 'Étaín missi, ingen Étar rí Eochraidi a sídaib. '"

"'A question, whence are you and where have you come from?', said Eochaid. 'It is not difficult,' said she. 'I am Étaín, the daughter of Étar, king of the Eochraige from the Otherworld mounds. '"

In T. Becfhola and A. Dhiarmada, the villains Becfhola and Banbán give the ambiguous answer 'Ní do chéin 'Not from far away'; probably revealing that they are from the Otherworld, since their royal interrogators would expect to know anybody of any status from the land around.<sup>1</sup> P. mac Cana<sup>2</sup> regards questions about origin as part of a preliterate 'traditional formula for referring to visitors from the Otherworld' and the regular conclusion of such a meeting follows in Serglige §12: Luid úadib iarom in fer ocus ní fetatar cia deochaid nó can don luid 'The man went from them then and they knew not whither he had gone nor whence he came.'

In some tales welcome is immediately extended to an unknown visitor, but with a hinted request for his name: Fochen don ócláech nad athgenamar 'Welcome to the warrior whom we do not know.'<sup>3</sup> In T. Étaíne the Otherworld Midir gives the usual reply to a welcome (see below), so that the king, Eochaid, repeats 'We do not know you.' Midir answers, 'I know you however'; and only after a third, direct, question does he identify himself. Known visitors are regularly

1. SG I 85, 81.

2. Ériu XXVI 38-40.

3. T. Étaíne (iii) § 2, A. Neill Noigíallai p. 323, E. Laegaire p. 380.

welcomed (the narrative idiom for this also appears below) and must compliment the host by saying they expected such hospitality of him: Aisl. Oeng. §6 (and note):

- (2) "Feraid-side fáilti friu. 'Fochén dúib,' ol Bodb,  
'a muintir in Dagdaí.' 'Is é do-roachtmar.'"

"He welcomes them. 'Welcome,' said Bodb, 'people of the Dagdae.' 'That is what we have come for.'"

This conventional response occurs in several early tales<sup>1</sup> and seems to be a spoken idiom. Another recurring comment and response has been identified in early Irish by G. O'Rahilly.<sup>2</sup> This is ferda sin ... ferda éicin, literally 'that is manly' 'manly indeed', but from its context simply a greeting. A hanged man and a talking animal so address Nerae and Fiachna of Cualnge<sup>3</sup>, perhaps with deliberate familiarity, 'hello there!'

Conventional greetings are less regularly included in later tales, but the occasion for them is marked in Scottish Gaelic oral tales by a recurring run in indirect speech: WHT II 221 (DGP)

- (3a) "Bheannaich Brian Bòrr e ann am briathran fisniche  
foisniche fìle mìle ciùin an seanchais. Fhreagair  
esan ann am briathran a b'fhearr, 's mar am b'iad  
a b'fhearr cha b'iad a bu mheasa."

"Brian Bóramha greeted him in expert sedate ?  
? peaceful words of wisdom. He replied in  
better words, and if they were not better they were  
no worse."

Duncan MacDonald extends this formula in his versions of DGP<sup>4</sup> and ECCR

1. T.B.Fr. §8, A. Guill & Gairb §24, B. Shenáin 2426 - see Ch.XI p 365.

2. Éigse XV 327.

3. E. Neraí §4; Cophar II 210, 235.

4. Sg. D. 17.

with a question to the unknown visitor :

- (3b) "Co an duine e, no có as a tainig e, no càit am bu ghnàth leis a bhith, no càit a bha e air a ruighinn?"

"What man was he, or whence had he come, or where was he accustomed to be, or where had he reached?"

The first part is fairly common<sup>1</sup> and may well derive from the manuscript description in DGP §29<sup>2</sup>:

- (3c) "Benuighus mac rí Éirionn do briathraibh foilsuint' fáthach fíorghlic fíreóilach dhó, agus freagras fear na h-aibide dhó a coomana na briathra céadna."

"The son of the king of Ireland greeted him with open skilful truly-clever truly-wise words and the man in the habit answered him in the same words."

Another recurring feature of speech reproduced in Gaelic tales is oaths. A common asseveration in the Ulster cycle<sup>3</sup> is Tongu dia tonges mo thuath 'I swear by what (sometimes do dia 'by the god') my tribe swears by.' This is doubtless a genuine pagan survival: there are other indications in the literature that the native gods presided over particular parts of Ireland, and in Gaul there are dedications to a god Teutates 'god of the tribe'. There may have other oaths, invoking the Gaelic gods by name, but this is the only one to be preserved in manuscript redactions of the literature. Variations on it persist in later tales, used to create an archaic, pagan atmosphere: TGG p. 70 luidhim fana déibh adharrdha 'I swear by the gods of worship'; ELSR §122 a dhé da n-adhram 'o god whom I worship'. Another Romantic tale, EMI p. 126, reproduces the old

1. TGSI XIII 71, WHT II 171, 475, W & S III 9.

2. Bruford 1966 p. 207 n. 40.

3. E.g. FB §§ 21, 32, 52, 74, 95; TBC LL 129, 1617, 1630; TB Regamna §§ 6, 7.



formula Toingim-si a dtoingid mo thuath.

In E. Neraí §18 Medb swears a longer oath until she sees the bulls (of TBC) fight:

- (4a) "Is ann aspert Medb o bés lugai, 'Tongu na dea thungus mo thuath, ná tairimfit ocus ná coitelfat for cluim ná colcuid ocus ní bom blathcha ocus ní cainfuirim mo taeib ocus ní cainairbiur derg flatha na finn ocus níconn airbiur biuth. '"

"Then said Medb, in the manner of an oath: I swear by the gods my tribe swears by, that I will not lie down, and I will not sleep on down or pillow, and I will not drink buttermilk, and I will not nurse my side, and I will not drink red ale or white, and I will not taste food."

In Imr. CM p. 102 the hero refuses to eat or drink until he learns his parentage. These conditions are also early associated with the imposition of geasa. In FB §26 Bricriu tells the Ulstermen it is geis for them to drink, eat or sleep until they set his house in order, and in Tromd. Guaire (Qss.) p. 102 Marbán puts the poets under geasa not to spend two nights in one house until they know the Táin. In oral tales the imposition of geasa has developed into a dialogue run, and the Irish form can be traced right back to these early examples: Beal.<sup>xy</sup>144 (Ubhall Óir)

- (4b) "Cuirim-se faoi gheas' thu, agus faoi mhór-dhiomú na bliana, gan an dárna néal a cholla ar aon leaba, ná an dárna béilí ithe ar aon mhias."

"I put you under geasa, and under the great misfortune of the year, not to sleep two naps on one bed, or eat two meals on one dish."

These conditions may appear in Scottish runs, e.g. WHF II 440 where the hero must not stop day or night, or eat dinner where he ate breakfast, or supper where he ate dinner. However those more usually (in this example, also) contain threats, Sg.D. p. 60:

- (4c) "Tha mi 'gad chur fo gheasaibh 's fo chrosaibh 's fo naoi buaraichean mnatha sìthle siubhla seachrain,

an laochan beag gearr donn as miot' agus as  
mí-threòiriche na thu fein a thoirt do chinn's  
do chluais 's do chaitheamh beatha dhíot.."

"I put you under geasa and crosses and the nine  
constraints of a wandering fairy woman in  
childbirth, that a little short brownhaired  
warrior, who is more timid and weaker than  
yourself, should take your head and your ear and  
your livelihood from you.."

These can also be paralleled in manuscript tales<sup>1</sup>: in TGD p. 262

Fionn threatens Conán that the 'son of a slave .. worse than

yourself .. will take your head and your livelihood'; and in TB

Flidhaise II<sup>2</sup> Bricriu threatens Fergus in verse with geis ort is

tróig mná trogain 'geis on you and the pangs of a woman in childbirth',

also found among the geasa imposed in Caithr. Congh. p. 112. Both of

these ideas have become somewhat changed in oral tradition: often

siubhla has become siubhlach 'wandering', since a cowfetter (buarach),

especially a fairy woman's, is a magic bond in itself; and laoch has

become laogh 'calf'. In both Ireland and Scotland the bespelled

person usually retorts by binding even stricter, and fantastic,

conditions on the opponent.<sup>3</sup>

Like the recurring descriptions, these recurring scenes  
easily become stereotyped in language, whether in ordinary speech or  
in oral/written narrative tradition. One feature of conversations in  
direct speech in Old Irish tales, that has been regularly taken as  
representative of the spoken language, is the use of dependent verbal  
forms in replies.<sup>4</sup> Two examples from TBC I are, (a) Ailill's

1. See Bruford 1966 p. 196.

2. CR II 106.

3. Beal. III 448; WHT II 351, MWHT I 414.

4. M. Draak 'Emotional Reflexes' Ériu XVI (1952) 74-78; D. Greene  
'The Responsive in Irish and Welsh' Indo-Celtica, Gedächtnisschrift  
für Alf Sommerfelt 59-72.

suggestions as to which Ulster warrior is harassing their forces  
(this is the third query, the correct answer is in fact Cú Chulainn)

l. 367:

- (5a) "'Ceist, inn é Éogan mac Derthacht?' 'Nach é,' ol Fergus, 'ní thargad-side tar or chríchi cen trichait (LU) carpat n-imrinn imbi.'"

"'A question, is it Éogan mac Derthacht?' 'It is not,' said Fergus, 'he would not come over the boundary of a province without thirty spiked chariots around him.'"

(b) Cú Chulainn's suggestion that they catch wild deer alive, l. 775:

- (5b) "'Ní cumcisiu ón a beó nach óe do breith,' ol int ara. 'Cuimcim éigin,' ar Cú Chulainn."

"'However you are not able to catch any of them alive,' said the charioteer. 'I can indeed,' said Cú Chulainn."

The explanations of this, as a natural 'echo-tendency' in conversation reinforced by emotion<sup>1</sup>, or the maintenance in this position of an archaic type of syntax<sup>2</sup>, are less important here than the opinion of these scholars that the tales reflect what was actually said. M. Draak also considers the independent use of first person singular prototonic verb forms recorded in direct speech in the early tales; such as atnu 'I consent'<sup>3</sup>, tiag-sa 'I (fully intend to) go'<sup>4</sup>; as the result of emotional pressure.

The realism of the impressionistic snatches of conversation appearing in tales of all periods is undeniable: TEDD §141; the

1. Draak pp. 74-5.

2. Greene p. 72.

3. TBC I 449.

4. TBC I 1468, TB Fr. § 22.



reavers march on the hall:

- (6a) "'Tá chéin,' for Conaire. 'Cid so?' 'Fianna ar thig,' ar Conall Cernach. 'Óig dóib sund,' ol Conaire. 'Ricfaiater a les innocht,' or Conall Cernach."

"'Silence a while,' said Conaire. 'What is this?'  
 'Warriors before the house,' said Conall Cernach.  
 'There are warriors for them here,' said Conaire.  
 'They will be needed tonight,' said Conall Cernach."

Imr. CM p. 112, the fifth island, where the voyagers overhear the inhabitants at a race meeting:

- (6b) "'Tuc ind each nglas!' 'Uig in gabair n-uidir thall!'  
 'Tuc in ngabuir ngil!' 'As luaithe mo each-sa!'  
 'Ferr léim mo eich-si!'"

"'Bring the grey horse!' 'Drive the dark horse yonder!'  
 'Bring the white horse!' 'My horse is faster!' 'My  
 horse jumps better!'"

B. Shuibhne § 64; Suibhne has a delusion of being beset by talking heads:

- (6c) "'Geilt é,' ar an céthenn. 'Gelt Ultach,' ar an dara cenn. 'A lenmhain co maith,' ar an treas cenn. 'Gurab fada an lenmhain,' ar an cethramadh cenn. 'Nogo ría fairrge,' ar an cúigedh cenn."

"'He's a madman,' said the first head. 'An Ulster madman,' said the second head. 'Follow him well,' said the third head. 'Long be the following,' said the fourth head. 'Till he reach the ocean,' said the fifth head."

A Scottish oral version of CMM<sup>1</sup>:

- (6d) "'Dé th'agad an sin?' 'Ceann Fhearghuis.' 'Cha'n e.'  
 'Gu dearbh's e.' 'Lig fhaicinn e!'"

"'What have you there?' 'Fergus' head.' 'It's not.'  
 'Indeed it is.' 'Show it!'"

However the presentation of direct speech in manuscript tales ought also to be considered. In the quotations here

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1. Conall, WHF II 178, Alexander MacNeill.

punctuation has been added, but Irish scribes had no speech marks, no question marks. In exx. 1b, 5a a question is prefixed ceist, and 1b also contains the regular answer, ní annsa. This formula is not only common in conversations in early Irish tales; but, in the form: cíad dia tá? 'What was the cause of?' Ní annsa, occurs at the beginning of several tales; and of almost every article of the prose compilations of personal and place name lore, Cóir Anmann and the Dindshenchus. In the Middle-Irish grammar Auraicept na nÉices, based on Latin models, the form ceist .. ní annsa occurs throughout. In fact the formula, as queror .. non difficile, seems to come from Late Latin didactic texts in dialogue form between master and pupil, and though especially popular in Hiberno-Latin sources this usage is 'not necessarily Irish.'<sup>1</sup> Though ceist is not a verbal form it is nevertheless a borrowing of Latin quaestio. In the examples here, and regularly elsewhere, ceist is abbreviated to c. and ní annsa to ní. Did the monastic scribe use this device in writing as a kind of punctuation; or did he, with his Latin learning, habitually use it in ordinary speech; or was it, with its associations with an oral teaching method, also well known to and used by the traditional native experts in tales and learning, the filid? Ceist is used in this way quite late in literary texts<sup>2</sup>, though it does not survive in modern speech.

Irish scribes, like oral reciters, had no punctuation mark to indicate direct speech, so that in written and oral tradition ambiguity is regularly resolved by referring to the identity of the

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1. K. Jackson *LHEB* p. 55, see also B. Löfstedt 'Der Hiberno-Lateinische Grammatiker Malsachanus' (Uppsala 1965) p. 22, with references to articles by B. Bischoff and L. Bieler.

2. E.g. O. Bergin, Irish Bardic Poetry poem 37, 17th century.

speaker as in exx. 1ab, 5b, 6ac above. The form used in written texts is unstressed ol (later ar), analyzed by E. G. Quin.<sup>1</sup> It glosses inquit ML 32<sup>as</sup>, is present or preterite in meaning according to context, and is followed by either an apparently independent third person nominative pronoun (i.e. with initial s, and stressed, though rarely with a long vowel) or a personal name or noun in the nominative. The modern oral form is arsa (plus subject) in both Irish and Scottish Gaelic (see exx. 8, 9b), and this also appears in some written texts<sup>2</sup> though it is not acceptable in classical verse. Like previous scholars, Quin rejects the idea that ol is a verb, but unlike them he takes ol se as the basic form, and construes it as preposition plus neuter accusative pronoun, 'beyond that, furthermore.' Its use in presenting conversations would thus be simply to refer to the identity of successive participants. If Quin is right this usage must have continued in spoken narrative throughout, while being replaced in written texts, even the most archaic, by an artificial literary 'verb' ol, followed by its 'subject.' However this theory need not affect the realism of the actual utterances. Even Latin verbs are quite commonly used to link the dialogue in manuscript texts.<sup>3</sup>

### Characterization

Conversations are often used to illustrate the characters in the tales. The impudent audacity of the seven-year-old Óí Chulainn has already appeared in ex. 5b, but a further example is

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1. Old-Irish ol 'inquit'; *Celtica* V (1960) 95-102.

2. See Quin p. 99.

3. P. Mac Cana, *Ériu* XXVI 38.



TBC I 729, where the charioteer attempts to keep him out of trouble by telling a hostile warrior he is only a child:

- (7) "Nida macc écin,' ol Cú Chulainn, 'acht is do chuindchid chomraic fri fer do-dechuid in macc fil and.' 'Is sain limsa ón,' ol in laech. 'Bíd sain duitsiu indossa isind áth ucut,' ol Cú Chulainn."

"I am not a boy at all,' said Cú Chulainn, 'but what boy there is has come looking for a fight with a man.' 'I think that's rich,' said the warrior. 'You'll find it rich now in the ford yonder,' said Cú Chulainn."

A hardened warrior in an early tale, Mac Cecht in TBDD §162, asks a woman passing by where he lies wounded on the battle-field, to relieve him of the 'fly or gnat or ant' which is biting him: she pulls a wolf off him and says 'this is an ant of an ancient land' (is sengán sentalman éin). The Ulster cycle also has a trouble-maker, Bricriu Nemthenga 'Poison tongue'. He constantly provokes quarrels<sup>1</sup>, and improper liaisons<sup>2</sup>, and these scenes usually appear in direct speech. In E. Neraí §18 an insinuating remark gets him laid up for a year, when he explains the bellow of a defeated bull to Medb in Fergus' presence: 'Rofetur-so ní, a mo bopa, a Fergus; as sin laíd ro-gaubuis himbuaruch,' ol Bricriu. "'I know that, my daddy Fergus, that is the song you sang this morning,' said Bricriu." The respectful/familiar term popa is used in other early tales, and preserved in the Ulster cycle.<sup>3</sup> In FB §44 Medb is familiarly addressed by Findabair a mátharnait 'motherkin'. The overbearing character of Medb, especially prominent in TBC LL, is largely illustrated in her speech.<sup>4</sup>

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1. FB §6, Immacc. an dá Thuara IX.

2. FT Becfholtaig 502; TB Flidhaise II, CR II 22.

3. TBC I 440, 489; TBDD §109; TB Flidhaise II, CR II 106 and note.

4. A. de Paor, Ériu IX 126-127.

Bravery and hardihood are also qualities demanded of the heroes of the Finn-cycle, but these also lay stress on another native ideal, generosity. The theme of contrasting the freedom and open-handedness of the Fenian way of life with the discipline required by St. Patrick and his converts begins in the Acallam and continues to oral tradition, usually in dialogue between Patrick and Caelte or Oisín.<sup>1</sup> From early Modern Irish on, the dialogue is usually in verse, as one of the Fenian lays; but D. Hyde collected an oral Irish prose version of St. Patrick's attempt to convert Oisín<sup>2</sup>: pp. 420-422

- (8) "'A Phádraig,' ar Oisín, 'cia an gheall ar dhamhnaigh Dia an méad sin daoine?' 'Mar gheall ar ubhall na h-aithne d'ithe,' arsa Naomh Pádraig. 'Da mbeithheadh fhios agam go raibh do Dhia chomh caol-radharcach agus gur dhamain sé an méad sin daoine ar ubhall, chuirfimis trí capla agus míle ag íomchar ubhall go flaitheas Dé chuige.'"

"'Patrick,' said Oisín, 'what is the reason why God condemned that number of people?' 'In return for eating the apple of knowledge,' said St. Patrick. 'If I had known that your God was so narrow-minded as to condemn all those people for an apple, we would have sent three horses and a mule bearing apples to him in the Kingdom of God!'"

The Finn cycle also has its trouble maker, Conán, and there is often entertaining dialogue between Conán, who is boorish and greedy, and the more refined, and amorous Diarmaid.<sup>3</sup> In Bruidhean Chaorthuinn, when the Fenians are magically stuck to the floor, Diarmaid brings Conán food §32 and says, in answer to his cries, that he doesn't like to throw it to him, in case it dirties him, and Conán retorts, 'A dog doesn't flee from a bone' (Ní theicheann cú roimh cnáimh). Scottish

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1. Acall. ll. 113-129.

2. Oscar au fléau, RC XIII 417-425.

3. E.g. ELSR §§ 72, 114.

oral versions of the tale seem to have developed this inherited situation in a further interchange at the end of the episode; Diarmaid brings blood to release the Fenians from their enchantment, but leaves Conán till the last, when<sup>1</sup>:

- (9) "'Amhradh ort, theirig an fhuil!'" 'Nam bu bhean  
bhriagh bhadanach bhuidhe mise 's maith a  
dh'amaiseadh tu mi!'"

"'Wailing take you, the blood has run out!'" 'If I  
were a fine curly-haired yellow-haired woman, well  
would you look after me!'"

Characterization in international popular tales is generally rudimentary, but even the stock figures of these can be illustrated through their conversation by oral Gaelic storytellers. In an Irish version of AT 1950<sup>2</sup> Finn asks three stupid giants their greatest possible laziness, the laziest of them to have a woman they have abducted. The first says that if he were in a burning house he would not move, the second that if he were on a rock with the tide rising round him he would sit there till he drowned. The third says that, if he were in bed with his back to the fairest woman sun or moon ever shone on, he would not bother to turn over; and is promptly awarded the woman. Goll offers to fight him for her, but when Finn asks him the lazy giant says 'Ó, maise m'anam nach dtroidfeadh' 'O Mary, 'pon my soul I won't' and Goll takes her.

### Dramatization

Important parts of the plot are regularly 'dramatized' in Gaelic tales by being cast in direct speech, especially those scenes

1. WHT II 185, Alexander MacNeill.
2. Critheagla gan Eagla, ZCP XIX 144.



where direct speech would naturally be involved. A recurring scene in the love tales is the meeting between hero and heroine, especially vigorous in early Irish tales with their assertive womenfolk, TB Fr.

§13 (Fraech and Findabair):

- (10a) "'Ceist, in n-élafa limm?' olse. 'Ní élub ém,' olsi,  
'or issam ingen rí gocus rí gna. Ní fhil dot'  
daidbri-siu náchim-éta-sa ó'm muntir. '"

"'A question, will you elope with me?' he said. 'No indeed,' said she, 'for I am the daughter of a king and a queen. You are not so poor that I could not be obtained from my people. '"

Although she also has confessed her love for her suitor, Étaín is careful to ask for her 'proper brideprice' in TBDD § 2. However an equally definite attitude to elopement is shown by the heroine of ECG, found sitting at her bower window in a Scottish oral version:<sup>1</sup>

- (10b) "'A Dhia,' arsa Conall, 'nach robh thu agam a bhos!'  
'O nach leum thu 'mias 's nach doir thu leat mi! '"

"'O God,' said Conall, 'would you were with me down here!' 'Well, why don't you jump up and take me with you? '"

Deirdre does her own courting, in the Old Irish version built on a bucolic remark by Noísi, Lg. § 9:

- (10c) "'Is caín,' olse-sseom, 'in tsamaisc tête sechunn!'  
'Dlegtair,' olsi-si, 'samaisci móra bale na-bít tairb.'  
'Atá tarb in chóicid lat,' or se-sseom, '.i. rí Ulad.'  
'No-togfainn-se etruib far ndís,' or sisi, 'ocus no-  
gébainn tarbín óag amalt-so. '"

"'Beautiful,' said he, 'is the heifer which goes past us!'  
'There are bound,' said she, 'to be big heifers where there are no bulls.' 'You have the bull of the province,' said he, 'that is, the king of Ulster.' 'I would choose between the two of you,' said she, 'and I would take a little young bull like you. '"

In T. Becfhola I 174 the king builds a similar conversation on Becfhola's request for seed wheat; he, he says, has the best in the

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1. TGS I XLIV 169, Angus MacLellan.

province.

Quarrels also are usually told in direct speech, like that over the fairy musician found in a yew tree which leads to the battle of Cenn Abrat, CMM I §9:

- (11) "'Beir breith dún, a Ailill.' 'Bec torbai,' or Ailill. 'Cid at-rubartbair in tan fríth in fer?' 'At-rubart-sa', or Lugaid, 'lemm a céol.' 'At-rubart-sa,' ar Éogan, 'is lem in céoluid.' 'Is fír,' or Ailill, 'la Éogan in fer.' 'Is drochbreth,' or Lugaid. 'Fír dano,' or Ailill. 'Ní fír,' or Lugaid, 'ní gnáth fír fort béolu.' 'Ní tú as chóir dia chairigud,' or Éogan, 'aithech samlut.' 'Bí aithech samlum-sa,' or Lugaid, 'lomméras a cend-sin dít-sa ocus saltéras fort leccoin.'"

"'Judge for us, Ailill.' 'Little use,' said Ailill. 'What did you say when the man was found?' 'I,' said Lugaid, 'said the music was mine.' 'I,' said Éogan, 'said the musician was mine.' 'It is true,' said Ailill, 'the man is Éogan's.' 'That's a bad judgement,' said Lugaid. 'It is true nonetheless,' said Ailill. 'It is not true,' said Lugaid, 'truth is unusual on your lips.' 'You are not fit to censure him,' said Éogan, 'a churl like you.' 'It will be a churl like me,' said Lugaid, 'who will shear that head from you, and who will trample on your cheek.'"

The motif of provocative boasting at a gathering, which regularly begins a story plot in the later language, also naturally appears in direct speech. In O. Denna Ríg §8, Cobthach Coel holds a feast, at which he asks who is the most generous man in Ireland, expecting to be told himself. His harper Craphthine and fili Ferchertne answer in turn that Labraid, who killed his only ox and his only cow for food on their respective visits, is more generous; and are ordered out of the land. Another motif, the prohibition on admitting any one to a feast without a craft, leads to the long interrogation of Lug, the god of every art, by the doorkeeper of Tara in CMT (ii) §§ 54-67. A further plot motif always told in direct speech is the gambling of human and supernatural, usually resulting in the imposition of geasa, eventually formalized in the 'bespelling' run, and quoted already, ex. (4), p<sup>92</sup>.

Other scenes may also be dramatized in direct speech, increasing vividness and suspense as the speakers, themselves characters in the tale, gradually reveal further information. In one of the Old Irish tales about him, Mongán pledges his wife to his fili, in lieu of confirmation of his account of the death of Fothad Airgdech.<sup>1</sup> However as his wife weeps he answers her, saying he hears his rescuer's feet in one river, then another, and the third time in a whole list of waters, coming from Munster to his fort in Rathmore. Prophecy is combined with dinnshenchus in the Bórama §64, where the high king Aed is advancing to fight the battle of Belach Díin Bolg. He asks his bishop brother for the names of the places they pass, and then for their explanation, but the names the cleric gives are those they will have after the king's defeat: the 'Pass of the Fort of the Bags', where his routed forces will abandon their provisions; the 'Flagstone of Breaking Bones' where he himself will be vanquished and beheaded; the 'Gap of the Shields', where his men will abandon their shields. In an Early Modern Irish tale, Forb. DD §99, the druid Mogh Ruith makes three hounds by magic to combat the three venomous sheep set on him by the enemy. He then asks his assistant Cennmar for alternate reports on sheep and hounds: as the sheep approach in single file the hounds are puppies opening their eyes; as the sheep speed up, two in front and one behind, the puppies move their eyes and ears; and as the sheep charge three abreast the dogs are grown enough to have their ears pricked up and their fur bristling.

In A. Dhiarmada various stages in the approach of the king's three-fold death are picked out in direct speech. Three druids on

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1. V. of Bran I 46.



p. 80 prophesy three different deaths; one murder, as he wears a shirt made from one flax-seed and a cloak of one sheep's wool, another drowning, as he drinks beer made from one grain, and the third burning, as he eats the meat of pigs unborn. Diarmaid's response to this is short: Is écsamail sin 'That is extraordinary.' However subsequently the ominous Banbán invites him to his home (see ex. (1)) and offers him his daughter instead of the queen, who refused to come. And at Banbán's feast the seemingly impossible conditions for Diarmaid's death are all fulfilled, p. 81:

- (12) "'Maith, a ben,' ol Banbán friaa ingin, 'in fil étach lat do'n rígh?' 'Fil,' ol ind ingen. Do-beir léne as in orieol ocus brat ocus nus-gaib in rí uimmi. 'Is maith in léne,' or cách. 'Is dingbhála duit,' ol Banbán, 'in léne oenruaisni. Ingen imtholtanach lium inn ingen uccut. Issí do-rinne oenróissne do chur co nderna scuab de, comba himaire eisein.' 'Is maith in brat,' or cách. 'Is maith,' ol Banbán, 'd'olainn oenchaerach do-rónad.' Tucad iar sin biadh ocus liann dóib. 'Is maith in tsail muici nád ro génair,' or Banbán. 'Cinnus?' or Diarmaid. 'Ní annsa: muca ainighi ro-gabtha scena dóib co tucta a n-oidre eistip at é beóa ocus gurro-biata.' 'Is maith in chorm,' ar cách. 'Iss maith,' or Banbán, 'is corm oengráindi..'"

"'Well, woman,' said Banbán to his daughter, 'have you clothing for the king?' 'Yes,' said the girl. She brings a shirt and cloak from the bag and the king puts them round him. 'The shirt is good,' said everyone. 'A shirt from a single flax-seed,' said Banbán, 'is worthy of you. She's a strong-willed girl in my opinion, the girl yonder. She it is who sowed the single flax-seed so that it became a sheaf and then a ridgeful.' 'The cloak is good,' said everyone. 'It is good,' said Banbán, 'it was made of one sheep's wool.' After that food and drink were brought to them. 'The fat of an unborn pig is good,' said Banbán. 'How?' said Diarmaid. 'It is not difficult; pigs with young had knives taken to them so that their piglets were brought out of them alive and were fattened.' 'The beer is good,' said everyone. 'It is good,' said Banbán, 'it is beer from a single grain..'"

This example also preserves two features of dialogue mentioned earlier, the use of the dependent form in replies, fil, and ní annsa. Part of the success of these scenes<sup>1</sup> is their inherent repetition: (Ná cí, a ben;

1. Vof Bran 146, Bóramha §64, Forb.DD §99, ex (12).

Ciata builg / cnáma / sceith itir on?; ocus na coin... ocus na caérigh; and what 'everybody' said above), but this can become over-rhetorical. A use of direct speech found mainly in late manuscript tales and oral tradition (also in MU II 277 and CRR I §9) is exact repetition of some asseveration by several characters, as a form of emphasis.<sup>1</sup>

### 'Literary' Dialogue

A tendency in late tales, however, is to incorporate fixed proverbs and proverbial phrases into the dialogue. Proverbs do appear in the earlier literature, and indeed are quoted with relish by native speakers; but where, for instance, Ói Chulainn in TBC I 640 says 'Provided I were famous, I would not care if I were only one day in the world', in Fog. CC §55 he quotes the proverb 'A man may live after losing his life, but not after losing his honour'<sup>2</sup>, and in ACC II §13 says Dóig atá in senfocal cuimnech acam: Buaine bladh ná saegal 'For I remember the old saying: Fame is more lasting than life.'<sup>3</sup> This must be the commonest proverb in the literature, quoted by Dubh Lacha in TDL §10 and thought by Finn in A. Finn II §40. A variant of the first type is quoted in BC §31 with 'satire' for 'honour', and Conán's retort in the next paragraph (see ex <sup>p99</sup>(9)) is also a proverb.<sup>4</sup> When Loingseachán<sup>5</sup> tries to bring Suibhne to his senses by telling him his father, mother, brother, daughter and son have died, Suibhne's

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1. TTT 1624, 4454, 5616; CNC p. 6; Ir: Béal I 229, III 452, Sc.: WHI II 180.
  2. O'Rahilly 1922 no. 276.
  3. O'Rahilly no. 134.
  4. O'Rahilly no. 335.
  5. B. Suibhne §35.

expressions of grief are in proverbial phrases; an only daughter is a 'needle in the heart', the death of his son is 'the drop that brings a man to the ground.' In CMR I l. 108 Congal Claen asks who is making each assault in the battle, 'everyone' tells him, and he dismisses successive armies with proverbial phrases; such as 'the valour of a dog on a dunghill' (gal chon for otrach); until the one he fears arrives. In CRR I §§40-44 there is a dialogue scene in which each man asks the one behind to take charge of the battle, and three of the six reply with proverbial phrases for vain undertakings.<sup>1</sup> In CRR II §34 these take up the whole conversation:

(13) " 'An cath ar do choimirce, a Chonuill,' ar Conchubhar.

'Is snámh a n-aghaidh srotha sin,' ar Conall, '7 ní fhaomhaim-si é.'

'An cath ar do choimirce, a Dháire mhic Fhiachraigh,' ar Conchubhar.

'Is roth fri learga soin,' ar Dáire, 'ocus ní fhaomaim-si é.'

'An cath ar do choimirce, a Eógain,' ar Conchubhar.

'Is urchar ó théid o láimh anosa,' ar Eóghan, 'ocus ní fhaomhaim-si é.'

'An cath ar bhar ccoimirce, a aos dána Uladh,' ar Conchubhar.

'Is áilleacán a láimh leinbh sin anosa,' ar Aímhigin ocus ar Cathfhadh, 'ocus ní fhaomham-ne é.'

'An cath ar do choimirce, a Iriail,' ar Conchubhar.

'Is dlaoi fri dhian-ghaoith sin anosa,' ar Irial, 'ocus ní fhaomhaim-si é.'

'An cath ar do choimirce, a Laoghaire Bhuadhaidh,' ar Conchubhar.

'Is easargain darach do dhoirneibh sin anois,' ar Laoghaire, 'ocus ní fhaomhaim-si é.' "

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1. Ch.VIII, Fighting ex. (8), pp 277-280.



" 'The battle in your charge, Conall,' said Conchubhar.

'That is 'swimming against the stream,' said Conall, 'and I don't accept it.'

'The battle in your charge, Dáire son of Fiachra,' said Conchubhar.

'That is 'a wheel against a slope', said Dáire, 'and I don't accept it.'

'The battle in your charge, Éóghan,' said Conchubhar.

'That is 'a cast of a cord from a hand' now,' said Éóghan, 'and I don't accept it.'

'The battle in your charge, learned men of Ulster,' said Conchubhar.

'That is 'a toy in an infant's hand' now,' said Aimhirgin and Cathfhadh, 'and we don't accept it.'

'The battle in your charge, Irial,' said Conchubhar.

'That is 'a lock of hair in a strong wind' now,' said Irial, 'and I don't accept it.'

'The battle in your charge, victorious Laoghaire,' said Conchubhar.

'That is 'battering an oak with fists' now,' said Laoghaire, 'and I don't accept it.' "

Eventually Cú Chulainn appears and takes the responsibility. Even more formal utterances - poems in stressed and syllabic metres - are of course attributed at an earlier date to characters in the literature.

Verses are dealt with in another chapter,<sup>1</sup> as are recurring descriptions and their common dialogue introduction - the Watchman device.<sup>2</sup> This serves to make the formulaic tuarascála of people more vivid by attributing them to someone actually in the story; and extra vividness is sometimes added, in the descriptions of mistaken appearances, by making the watchers quarrel among themselves.<sup>3</sup> Of

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1. p110f. 2. pp153-156.  
3. See Ch. IX ex(4), p286.

course the watchman device may be used without a formulaic description. I have recounted an instance in Forbais Droma Damhghaire, and it is regularly used in oral tradition in the story of 'Oisín after the Fenians', where the blind Oisín summons up the deer of old time, and has his lad describe to him the animals approaching, so that they know when to loose the hound.<sup>1</sup> The watchman device with descriptions of people disappears quite early, probably because these were themselves being superseded in popularity by the 'action' runs: arming, fighting, sailing. However, in modern oral tradition, these runs also have their associated pieces of dialogue. These were probably introduced, like the early Irish use of the watchman device, to vitalize the run in the context of the tale; but like it have become conventional. Thus the fighting run is interrupted in oral Irish by the voice or robin which encourages the hero; and in both Ireland and Scotland the hero afterwards has a dialogue with the vanquished opponent, usually a giant. In Scotland this begins: 'Bàs os do chionn. Gu dé t' éiric?' 'Death is over your head. What's your ransom?'<sup>2</sup> At the end of the sailing run, in Scottish tradition, one of the sailors is sent up the mast to watch for land, announcing when he sights something at last: 'Tha e mòr a dh'fheannaig 's beag dh'fhearann.' 'It's big for a crow, though small for land.'<sup>3</sup>

This survey was intended to illustrate the use of direct speech in Gaelic story telling of all periods, from Old Irish to tales current orally in Ireland and Scotland. However it will be clear that

1. WHT II 105.

2. Sg. D. 54.

3. W & S IV 252, also WHT II 473, W & S IV 150; Irish: Bruford 1966 p. 192.

most of the quotations come from either the beginning (in manuscripts) or the end of the storytelling tradition; the latest manuscript examples given in full are Middle Irish (6c, 12, 13). This however is no accident. There are dialogues in Early Modern Irish tales that are lively, if sometimes a little long-winded: Clothru's seduction of her brothers (C. Cumair §8), Uathach's attempted seduction of Óí Chulainn, with the proverb gach sloigh nach soith soithfider 'every host which attacks not will be attacked' (Fog. CC §43), Éoghan's meeting with three evil hags (CML §88), to whose remarks he comments mildly, 'On my conscience, that is not the activity of good women!'. These are all tales of earlier native origin, like some Finn-cycle romances referred to already. Drawing nearer to modern oral tradition, there is an enjoyably wooden conversation in Sg. R. 1171 between the hero and a giant who shows him a pile of heads and bones. However in general the Romantic tales, and especially those not based on earlier native cycles, do not exploit direct speech to the full; it is used for short comments, emphasis and rhetoric, but there is little attempt at realism or the dramatization of whole scenes. Tales adapted from the classics in Irish<sup>1</sup> follow their models in having very little direct speech, except in long monologues attributed to the characters; and these also appear in the Romances, presumably also under foreign influence. However I think it is clear that, despite the apparent break, the vigorous dialogue of early Irish tales reappears in modern oral tradition.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ch. XI, pp 363-4.

2. See J. Delargy, *The Gaelic Storyteller* 1945 p. 33.



CHAPTER V  
Verse

The Two Metrical Types :

A Stressed Metre p.111.

- (i) Prehistoric Origins p.112.
- (ii) The Terms retoiuric and roscað p.111.
- (iii) The use of Stressed Metre p.114.
- (iv) The development of form p.122.
- (v) Dating p.123.
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B Syllabic Metre p.125.

- 1 Early Christian Origins p.125.
- 2 The use of Syllabic Metre p.126.
- 3. Relation of Syllabic verse to Prose Narrative p.132.

## Verse V

The verses which appear in Gaelic tales are of two metrical types. In one the lines are measured by the number of syllables, are grouped in stanzas and linked to each other by rhyme; in the other the lines are measured by stress and rhythm, are not in any regular stanzaic grouping, and are commonly linked to each other by alliteration.

### (a) Stressed metre

The second type is that sometimes denoted in early manuscripts (LU, and LL - the most consistent) by the marginal abbreviation r. In some tales such passages are also introduced by the Latin term retoiric<sup>1</sup> or in others, usually later, by the native words rithlerg/riotharg 'an impromptu composition in free verse'<sup>2</sup> or rosg/roscad 'a short chant' or 'maxim'<sup>3</sup>. In some tales<sup>4</sup> stressed metre passages are referred to as laíd, probably at one time the generic term for stressed metre poems in tales as it later, with rainn, became for syllabic poems<sup>5</sup>. However, the expansion of r as retoiric by R. Thurneysen<sup>6</sup>, followed by J. Carney<sup>7</sup>, has led them to see external influence on the genre; according to Thurneysen especially that of deliberately obscure Hispanoic Latin rhetoric, though he also saw parallellism between phrases reminiscent of liturgical formulae. Nevertheless Thurneysen found a possible native source

1. Derived from rhetorica, IHK p.54.

2. Derived from retoiric by popular etymology, IHK p.54.

3. retoiric TBDD para. 101 (LU 7438), A.Chonchobuir A para. 13 (LL), T. Ferbe II 180, Forb. DD paras. 39,63; rithlerg CRR II para.27, TTT 7135; rosg ACC II paras. 17,45 (GJ), ACT 386,446, TTT 2711.

4. TBDD para. 101, Serglige CC para. 18, TBC I 3524.

5. P.mac Cana, Celtica VII.

6. IHK p.55.

7. 1955 p.300.

for retoiric in obscure unstructured pagan mantic utterances, and Carney pointed out the connection with 'archaistic legal formulae' used for 'oral instruction'.

More recently D. A. Binchy<sup>1</sup> has stated that in the written texts of early Irish law the archaic stratum, consisting of 'primitive verse or rhythmic alliterative prose', is frequently denoted by marginal r. The oral tradition of the law schools (fénechus) is said to have consisted of fásaige 'precedents', and roscada, earlier translated by Dr. Binchy as 'legal maxims and aphorisms' from the contents, now widened by him to include the rhythmic mnemonic form in which they are preserved. In his view marginal r stands for roscad. This view had already been reached, through studying the examples in tales, by P. mac Cana<sup>2</sup>, who suggests that the term retoiric therefore be restricted by modern academics to those passages apparently in rhythmic prose, or, as he regards it, 'as yet not analysed from the point of view of metrical structure'.<sup>3</sup> Manuscripts usually separate the lines of stressed metre by stops, but these can easily be omitted or misplaced.

Those passages clearly in regular metre have been dealt with further by C. Watkins<sup>4</sup>. He regards Gaelic stressed metre as the native descendant of Indo-European metrics, and identifies two types, a short informal line and a longer more solemn type, as in Indo-European. The early Irish short line has but two stresses, that is, two stressed words usually amounting to three or four syllables without any caesura, and the final word of one line

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1. Indo-Celtica ed. Pilch and Thurow p.31.

2. Celtica VII (1966) 65-90.

3. p.89.

4. Celtica VI 194-249.



linked to the first of the next by alliteration. The long line could also vary in number of syllables, but frequently consisted of seven, two stressed disyllables followed by a caesura and a final trisyllabic word. There is linking alliteration across the caesura as well as between the final word of one line and the first of the next. This is the type found most regularly in the Laws.

Watkins<sup>1</sup> regards the use of alliteration as an innovation, since it 'presupposes a demarcative word accent', which, he thinks, could not have existed in Gaelic till the system of initial mutations was stabilised in the 5th century. However, most scholars have argued that the system of alliteration, in which each consonant now alliterates both with its radical and its mutated forms, must be earlier than the mutations. However the rules for alliteration in stressed metre, especially that linking lines, seem to be rather different from those which hold in later verse:<sup>2</sup> radical t can alliterate with d, c with g, a stressed word with an unstressed, or an initial consonant with an internal<sup>3</sup>. Thus a tolerance or taste for inexact phonetic repetition (as seen later in Irish rhyme in syllabic verse within phonetic groupings) already existed in the early language, and contrary to Watkin's theory, 'alliteration' was not even confined to stressed syllables.

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1. p.219.

2. G. Murphy 1961 p.39.

3. e.g. ex. (1) éga/guss, ferge/fo (5) - chass/ségdaib, díanim/niamdai. See also the formulaic lines describing lips and chariot wheels, Ch VI exx. 2, 5; p 146, p 169; p 150, p 171.

It seems therefore that the type of verse cultivated in pre-literate Gaelic tradition was stressed and alliterative, and known by the generic term of roscad. The term retoiric must have been invented by later monastic scholars, who saw that their tradition formed a parallel to, though not derived from, rhetorical style in Latin. The use of marginal r (roscad) to refer to passages in manuscripts apparently in rhetorical prose may indicate scribal corruption, but it may also imply that in early Ireland the criterion of ornament, i.e. heightened against ordinary style, was more important than the difference between regular and irregular rhythm, i.e. between verse and prose. Murphy, taking up Thurneysen's explanation, has suggested<sup>1</sup> that if 'retoiric' represents the form of mantic utterances by ancient filid, then regular stressed metre is the form they used for artistic composition. If verse epic had been cultivated in early Ireland one would expect it to have been in long-line stressed metre. In fact all three types: long-line, short-line, and 'retoiric': occur as interludes in the prose manuscript tales. Some tales include only roscad<sup>2</sup>, while others have both roscad passages and verses in syllabic metres<sup>3</sup>.

All but one or two<sup>4</sup> of the roscad passages in tales are utterances of the characters. At times of stress whole conversations take place in heightened language, as in Táin Bó Cualnge, between

1. p.7.

2. FB, CMT(ii), TBDD, ACC I, CRR II, Immaccallam in dá Thuarad, Aigidecht Aithirne.

4. A. Fergus I, Org. DR.

3. TBC, Serglige CC, Lg., Forb. DD, TTT.

Ailill, and Fergus and Medb, whom he has just discovered sleeping together<sup>1</sup>; in Serglige Con Culainn between Cú Chulainn, his wife Emer, and another woman whom he loves;<sup>2</sup> in Echtra Chondlai between Condla and the Otherworld woman<sup>3</sup> and between outraged subject and feeble king in Esnada Tige Buchet<sup>4</sup>. Most of these conversations seem to be in unstructured 'retoiric', though Watkins has shown that part of Serglige para. 40 is in regular metre, like the conversation in Longes mach Uislenn<sup>5</sup>. The language of the examples in Táin Bó Cualnge<sup>6</sup> seems to be deliberately obscure. Conversations in heightened language are rare in later tales<sup>7</sup>. However, the language of retoiric has clearly influenced the speeches in Airecc Menman Uraird meic Coisse<sup>8</sup> and Erchoitmed Inge Gulide<sup>9</sup>.

In recurring scenes among the heroes -greetings, boasting, exhortations- however, the utterances are regularly in stressed metre. The first two are often constructed of kennings or metaphors describing the hero. Greetings regularly begin with 'Fochen' 'welcome', as in<sup>10</sup> the meeting of Cet mac Mágach and Conall Cernach, which shows some of the features of linking alliteration mentioned above:

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1. TBC I 1068 f.
  2. para. 40 f.
  3. para 1 f.
  4. paras. 3-4.
  5. paras. 3-5, see ex. 5, p. 119.
  6. I 1068, 2428 f.
  7. T. Gráinne ZCP I 458, TBC II CFD 3071 f.
  8. Paras. 29, 30, 32.
  9. Paras. 6, 9.
  10. Scéla Mucce meic Da Thó para. 15.



- (1) "Fochen Conall, críde licce, londbruth loga, luchair éga,  
guss flann ferge fo chích curad crechtaig cathbuadaig",  
"Welcome Conall, heart of flagstone, fierce heat of a hero,  
glitter of ice, red strength of anger under the breast of a  
warrior wound-dealing, victorious in battle."

Conall answers in similar vein<sup>1</sup>, and then continues  
prophetically in 'retoiric':

" 'Bid menn innar n-imchromraic-ni ón', ol Conall, 'ocus bid  
menn inar n-imscarad; bid airscéla la fer mbrot, bid  
fiadnaise la fer manath, ar ar-cichset airg[il(é)oman  
londgliaid, na dá err, eblait echt ar echt, regaid fer dar  
fer is 'taig seo innocht'. "

" 'That will be clear in our joint contest' said Conall, 'and  
it will be clear in our joint parting, it will be famous  
tales for the man of goads and witness for the man of awls,  
for warriors will step forth in the fierce combat of lions,  
the two chariot-fighters will perform deed upon deed,  
man will go over man in this house tonight'. "

As well as greetings between adult warriors, the infant kings  
Cormac mac Airt and Niall Noígíallach are also greeted with a  
roscad beginning Mochen<sup>2</sup>, and greetings in roscad are exchanged  
between Tadhg mac Céin and the couple on the Otherworld island<sup>3</sup>.  
Boasting is less common<sup>4</sup>. Roscad exhortations are usually to

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1. So also Serglige paras. 17, 18, 38 (short line with Fochen,  
reply in para. 19 in 'retoiric'; FB paras. 16, 48, 52 (short  
line, no Fochen); MU LL 58, 89, 833 (Fochen).
  2. Gen. Chormaic p. 254 ('retoiric'); EME para. 3 (short line).
  3. E. Thaidhg pp. 349-50 (long line, short line, long line).
  4. FB para. 35, CRR II paras. 35, 39.

battle, and begin with an imperative 'Arise'. There are several examples in TBC I; the (long-line) incantation of Lug (eli Loga, TBC I 2217) spoken by the god after he has healed Cú Chulainn in his sleep, or the series of three (beginning 'Comergid rí Macha' 'Arise O kings of Macha',) spoken by Ulster warriors before the last battle.<sup>1</sup> The first of these, all short-line, continues with a series of commands, linked by alliteration:

- (2) "Meilid faebra. Fichith cath. Claidig búrach. Bendaich sciathu."

"Sharpen blades. Fight the battle. Dig a trench. Strike shields".

<sup>2</sup>Exhortations are probably the most popular of these types, and certainly the longest-surviving. The later examples do not preserve the conventional opening, but are otherwise in the same heroic tradition,<sup>3</sup> including kennings:

- (3) "A Mhic-Lughach laoch-arnaidh,  
a thriath talchar troigh-esgaidh,  
a bheithir bhailc bhéimionnach,  
a nathair nuadh neart-chalma ...

Ní rug rígh na ridire

a n-am áigh no iorghaile

buaidh do láimhe, a laoi ch thréine,

ariamh co n-uige a n-aimsir sin,

a Mhic mheanmaigh mhór-Lughach"

"O sure warrior Mac-Lughach, determined nimble-footed champion,  
mighty violent bear, fresh strong-valiant serpent:

1. 3905, 3917, 3930.

2. Other examples ACC I LL 13779, 13925 (long-line: 'retoiric') = ACC II para. 33, Serglige para. 28 (long-line), TBDD para. 110 ('retoiric'), CMT (ii) paras. 129, 137 ('retoiric') (ZCP XII pp. 402, 404), CRR II para. 27 (long-line) TTT II 2711, 5711, 7135 (long-line).

3. TTT 1.7135.

No king or knight, in the time of battle or conflict, ever took, O mighty warrior, the victory of your arm from you until this time, O spirited son of great Lugh."

Other examples of stressed metre in tales illustrate most of the functions of verse known in Gaelic society. Little has been preserved of non-aristocratic poetry till modern times, but in Tochmarc Étaíne<sup>1</sup> there is a short line roscad sung by Otherworld labourers as they build a causeway across a bog. In the tales Serglige Con Culainn<sup>2</sup> and Cath Airtig<sup>3</sup> inaugural instructions by senior warriors to kings-elect are in stressed metre; as in longer independent native Speculum Principis texts, like Audacht Moraind. The passage in Cath Airtig begins with a lament for Conchobar, and long elegies in roscad appear in various early tales: for Christ by Conchobar,<sup>4</sup> for Cú Ruí by his fili<sup>5</sup>, for Cú Chulainn by his wife<sup>6</sup>. All of these seem to be in 'retoiric'. One section of the elegy<sup>7</sup> for Cú Chulainn lists the Ulster warriors, lamenting that each one was not there to help. Each line has internal alliteration, and the verbs which form the line ends are in dependent rather than relative form, according to Bergin's Law<sup>8</sup>:

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1. (iii) para. 8.
  2. 'retoiric'; a series of alliterative parallel commands, paras. 25-6.
  3. Long-line, paras. 3-4.
  4. A. Chonchobair A para. 12.
  5. ACR paras. 11-2.
  6. ACC I, LL 14220 ff.
  7. LL14256-73; fifteen are named.
  8. Ériu XII 200.



- (4) "Apraind nach Conchobar claidebruad comairlestar

Dursan nad Eirge Echbél arnic ...

Apraind nach Éogan Álaind acillestar

Dursan nach Fergna mac Findchaeme forcmastar ..."

"Alas that red-sworded Conchobar did not advise.

Woe that Eirge Horselip did not arrive.

Alas that beautiful Éogan did not converse.

Woe that Fergna son of Findchaem did not preserve."

Verses in stressed metre are also used for description, of nature<sup>1</sup> or of people<sup>2</sup> such as Deirdre, whose future beauty Cathbadh the druid describes to her mother while she is still in the womb<sup>3</sup>:

- (5) "Fot chríol bronn bécestar

bé fuilt buidi buide-chass,

séгдаib súilib sell-glasaib;

sian a gruade gorm-chorcraí,

fri dath snechtai samlamar

sét a dégne díanaí),

niamdai a beóil partuing-deirg:

bé dia mbiat il-ardbe

eter Ulad erredaib!"

"In the hollow of your womb cried out a woman of yellow hair yellow-curling, with stately blue-irised eyes. Her dark-purple cheeks are foxglove. To the colour of snow I liken the treasure of her perfect teeth. Her scarlet-red lips are lustrous. A woman for whom there will be much slaughter among the chariot-warriors of Ulster."

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1. Aig. Aithirne paras. 1-5, 7-9, CRR I para. 7, A. Guill & Gairb para. 36, TBDD (Eg.) para. 156, Immacc. in Da Thuarad 11.149-73.
  2. TBDD paras. 93, 100, 130, TBC II 4561; FB paras. 45, 47, 49 etc. see Cú Chulainn and his chariot Ch. VI a p. 181, ref. p. 169.
  3. Lg. para. 4, ed. C. Watkins Celtica VI p. 223.

This is a long-line roscaid, with alliteration both within the line (over the caesura) and between consecutive lines in most cases.

The prophetic element also occurs in the mochen greetings to children<sup>1</sup> as well as in the warrior greeting ex. 2b. Stressed metre verses in tales seem particularly associated with the mantic function. Several are said to have been uttered through divinatory rites. Scáthach's prophecy to Cú Chulainn of his future in Táin Bó Cuailnge<sup>2</sup>, beginning fochen, is said to have been 'sung' through imbas forosnaí; and in various tales about him Finn is said to have spoken through imbas and dichan díchetar after gaining his magic knowledge and when using it to identify an unknown man<sup>3</sup>, and through teinm laedo in prophesying St. Ciarán<sup>4</sup>. Another roscaid attributed to the god Lugh is an exhortation cétal said to have been chanted by him as he went round the Men of Ireland on one foot and with one eye closed, a magical practice called corrquin-echt<sup>5</sup>. Many examples come to the characters who utter them as visions in their sleep<sup>6</sup>, or as portents<sup>7</sup>. P. mac Cana has suggested<sup>8</sup> that the archaic formula co cloth ní 'something was heard' which introduces the various speeches in the TBC I 'retoiric' dialogues, originally belonged to prophecies uttered in a trance, and was

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1. Gen. Chorm. p.254, EME para 3 - also by a druid.

2. T. Emere para. 79.

3. RC XXV 346, 348.

4. RC XIII 11.

5. CMT (ii) para. 128.

6. TBC I 3528, 3904; TBDD para. 101, A. Muirchertaig para. 33; C. Chrionna p.321.

7. A. Fergusa II p.251.

8. Celtica VII 81.

later generalized for any obscure archaic utterance<sup>1</sup>. Many poems contain the ambiguous word scél 'story, prophecy'<sup>2</sup>. Some of the prophecies of doom which punctuate Togail Bruidne da Derga are the three uttered by the three red warriors, geis to the king, who appear before him on the road. All of these<sup>3</sup> begin: En a meic mór in scél 'Lo, lad, great the tidings', and the third includes a description of the coming carriage in short-line roscad:

- (6) "Móra airdi.airdbi saegail.sasad fiach.fothad mbran.  
bresal airlig.airliachtad faebuir."

"Great the signs, cutting off of life, satisfying crows,  
sustaining ravens, din of slaughter, whetting a blade."

Similar gloating prophecies are attributed to the Morrígan<sup>4</sup>, or later to the bean sídhe who washes the spoils before the battle<sup>5</sup>. Another recurring type of prophecy is that<sup>of</sup> a time of dearth and evil at the end of the world<sup>6</sup>, which constitutes the entire listed tales of Baile Bic meic Dé and Fís/Baile Fursa<sup>7</sup> in their extant form. A prophecy of this type also attributed to Becc mac Dé in Aided Dhiarmada<sup>8</sup> keeps the short-line form of roscad, but substitutes end-rhyme for linking alliteration:

1. TEDD para 101 (YBL); TBC I 3917, 3538.
2. FB para. 71, CMT(i) para. 20, Forb. D.D para. 62, CML para. 89.
3. paras. 32, 34, 36.
4. TBC I 3877.
5. Caithr. Thoir p. 105.
6. Immacallam in dá Thuarad 1.149 (scél), CMT (ii) para. 166.
7. Ed. K. Meyer ZCP IX 168-9.
8. p.80.



- (7) "Mess fás        fídh cáin,  
          olcc bláth    ili gaíth,  
          samh fliuch   ith nglass,  
          immat buar    terc ass";

"Mast empty, the wood beautiful, bad blossom, many winds,  
 summer wet, green corn, much cattle, milk scarce!"

In early tales, or tales which contain only roscad poems, speech poems in stressed metre were used in any poetic situation, and by anybody. However in later tales, apart from those which preserve the convention of heroic greetings<sup>1</sup>, such roscad passages as do occur are almost always attributed to druids<sup>2</sup> and supernaturalists, and are prophetic<sup>3</sup>. In the words of P. mac Cana<sup>4</sup>, the form itself "was sufficient to evoke an impression of archaism and to convey an oblique reference to the remote reaches of native tradition". When the heroes of the Ulster cycle are shown as Christian converts<sup>5</sup> roscad is used to give their actual words.

The form of roscad passages tends to become more regular in later tales and retoiric is rare. Some late examples preserve some linking alliteration between the lines<sup>6</sup>, but others adopt a pattern of loose end rhymes, either of alternate lines<sup>7</sup>, or in more complicated stanzaic patterns<sup>8</sup>, as in the various types of

1. E. Thaidg, CRR II, TTT.
2. Forb. DD.
3. T. Ferbe II 11.181, 201 druid; C. Cumair paras. 4,7 druids; Caithr. Congh paras xviii, lxiv; CML paras. 89,90 hags.
4. Celtica VII 76.
5. ACC I 14179, 14198; A. Chonchobuir para. 12.
6. Forb. DD paras. 39,62,65; C. Cumair paras. 4,7.
7. CML para. 89; Forb. DD paras. 64,70.
8. Forb. DD paras. 39,84.

syllabic verse. Alliteration within the line of the long-line type remains clearly marked. In later examples also the sense is usually divided into line units, and does not carry on from one line to the next. Both this and linking rhyme could be derived from the early examples which show parallel syntax in successive lines<sup>1</sup>. Repetitions of the same syntactic and rhythmic pattern would be easy to compose, and passages in the form of longline roscad sometimes appear in descriptions: of food<sup>2</sup>, or of a warrior, in kennings<sup>3</sup>.

Many of the speech-poem roscada in tales, like ex.(3), have a dúnad, 'closure', in which the last line of the poem is signalled by some quotation from the first, a familiar feature in syllabic verse<sup>4</sup>. This identifies them as self-contained passages, and if ancient, goes further to show that the stressed-metre poems in early manuscript tales are not merely survivals of a once-consecutive narrative. However many of them seem certainly older than the surrounding prose. Dr. Binchy<sup>5</sup> states 'That all or most of them were 'composed' at the same time as the rest of the text is in my view linguistically impossible'. He edits and translates one of the TBC I dialogue 'retoiric' passages here<sup>6</sup>, and elsewhere refers to the prophetic long-line roscad in Lg as 'an obviously archaic poem'<sup>7</sup>. Characteristic of the early examples is the

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1. Exx. (1), (2), (4), (6), Serglige CC paras. 17, 18; ETB para. 4 (noun and adjective, verb and object): see CRR II paras. 33, 39; Forb.DD paras. 65, 73, 74, 92.
  2. Aisl. MC I p.81.
  3. T.Troi LL 32367.
  4. TBC I 11.1951,2117,3905,3930; FB paras. 33,68; Serglige CC paras. 17,18,19,28,38;and regularly in later tales.
  5. 1972 p.32.
  6. pp. 34-6, TBC I 1068.
  7. Eigse VI 182 (ex.5, p.119).

absence of Christian Latin loans and the definite article in, the use of scéo 'and' rather than ocus,<sup>1</sup> and verbs in Bergin's Law construction<sup>2</sup>, tmesis<sup>3</sup>, and the use of the dative without preposition are common. Translation is often very difficult. The archaism and deliberate obscurity of some early examples would lead to corruption of the text whether in oral or in written tradition<sup>4</sup>.

Later examples hark back to the earlier ones. Early examples may be imitated<sup>5</sup> or rewritten for later versions of the same tale<sup>6</sup>. It is also characteristic for roscada to seem to be in language older than the surrounding narrative. Various Early Modern Irish examples regularly have verb-forms at the line ends,<sup>7</sup> a memory of the Bergin's Law construction?

As well as underlining dramatic moments, P. mac Cana<sup>8</sup> thinks that " 'rhetorics' of the TBC type were also probably regarded as occasions for the storyteller to show off his verbal and literary skill - rather like the 'runs' in a modern folktale - and presumably this endowed them with considerable importance in the eyes of the

1. TBC I 1.1956, LL 37020.
2. ex. (4) p. 119.
3. AAA para. 5, Forb. FF p. 565, ETB 1.502.
4. There is some evidence that roscada might be written down before the rest of the tale e.g. Forb. FF.
5. TBC II CFD 1.3415f, ex. (4).
6. ACC II para. 33 from I 1.13925; CRR II para. 32 from I para. 38.
7. CMT(i) paras. 20, 55, 57; CML para. 90; A. Fergusua meic Léide II p. 251.
8. Celtica VII 84.



filid as of their audience." It is no longer possible to discover how the roscada would have sounded in actual performance, but presumably they would have been sung.

Stressed metre with its evocation of pagan antiquity survived longer in tales than elsewhere. However it was also subject to excision when tales were modernized. Neither of the 'retoric' dialogues of TBC I is preserved in TBC II. Later in Cath Maighe Léna the hags' prophecies, in short-line and long-line roscad<sup>1</sup>, are replaced by syllabic poems in some manuscripts<sup>2</sup>. Syllabic verse was taking over all the functions of roscad. In Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh (p.112) a prophecy in long-line roscad is immediately repeated in a syllabic poem on the same theme.

#### (b) Syllabic metres

Syllabic verse, rhymed, stanzaic and with a regular syllable count in each line, was once thought to be a development of Christian Latin hymn metres. As with roscad there were several types. The only one of these to have a fixed legal price in the early metrical tracts<sup>3</sup>, dian, is, in its form dian midsheng<sup>4</sup>, an exact replica in Irish of the Latin trochaic tetrameter catalectic, well known in Irish Latin hymns<sup>5</sup>. However the frequent occurrence of a seven-syllabled line in long-line roscad is now also seen as a source of the seven-syllabled lines of the most popular syllabic metres<sup>6</sup>, and rhyme as a possible development from the

1. paras. 89,90.

2. CML xii.

3. MV II para 93.

4. Quatrains: 8<sup>2</sup> 7<sup>3</sup> 8<sup>2</sup> 7<sup>3</sup>, b and d rhyme.

5. G. Murphy 1961 pp. 12,21-25.

6. Quatrains: debide 7<sup>1</sup> 7<sup>2</sup> 7<sup>1</sup> 7<sup>2</sup> a and b, c and d rhyme;  
rannaigeacht 7<sup>1</sup> 7<sup>1</sup> 7<sup>1</sup> 7<sup>1</sup> (mór) 7<sup>2</sup> 7<sup>2</sup> 7<sup>2</sup> 7<sup>2</sup> (bec), b and d rhyme;  
ae freslige 7<sup>2</sup> 7<sup>3</sup> 7<sup>2</sup> 7<sup>3</sup> a and c, b and d rhyme.

fixed cadence in stressed metre<sup>1</sup>. As with roscad there were also syllabic metres with a shorter line, used in less formal, more lyrical situations<sup>2</sup>. Probably syllabic verse was first cultivated by Irish monks, in the words of the metrical tracts<sup>3</sup> they are 'new forms' nuachrotha for the nualitride 'the new learned'. However from the beginning they use a poetic vocabulary and are linguistically more conservative than prose.

Nevertheless early verses in the syllabic metres show a new introspective note, generally considered as the result of the new emphasis of Christianity on the individual soul rather than kin-group or social ideals. In religious poetry the authors put themselves inside the minds of their characters and the hermit lyrics saw nature in a new light, as the personal creation of God. This emotional intensity appears in syllabic speech-poems in early tales, contrasting strangely with the terse, clipped narrative and dialogue. In the religious tale Comrac Liadain ocus Cuirithir the poet hero and heroine arrange to consummate their love at their next meeting, but before this can happen the poetess, Liadán, tries to renounce the world and takes the veil. When and why she does this is hardly made clear in the prose, but comes out in the final poem<sup>4</sup>:

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1. C. Watkins, *Celtica* VI 248.

2. However, J. Carney regards both debide and rannaigeacht metres as descendants of the two-stress roscad line, from types which developed rhyme between the end words of every second, or every fourth line, thus dividing the poem into stanzas (*Eriu* XXII 56,58), like the rhyming roscada in Forbais Broma Damhghaire. A syllabically regular form of the second type exists in Old and Middle Irish as a lyric metre: ochtfhoclach.

3. *MV* I para. 68.

4. p.22, treochair, 1st and last verses.

"Cen áinius

in chaingen do rigénus:

an rocharus rocráidius.

Ba mire

ná dernad a airer som,

manbad omun rí g nime ...

Deilm ndegae

ro tetaind mo chride-sae

rofess nícon bíad cenae."

"The bargain I have made is joyless, I have tortured the one I loved. It was madness not to do his will, but for the fear of the King of Heaven. ... A roar of fire has split my heart. It is known it would not exist without him. "

Other poems<sup>1</sup> are dialogues between herself, her lover, and the saint to whom they go for counsel. An example of the new attitude in secular tales can be found in Scéla Cano meic Gartnán, a historical romance about 7th century characters. Christianity is only referred to briefly, but whereas, in the old tales containing roscada, an attempt to hunt swans is liable to bring a character into contact with the pagan Otherworld<sup>2</sup>, in Scéla Cano the hero's unsuccessful casts provoke him to a verse meditation on his real mission in exile.<sup>3</sup>

In both Scéla Cano<sup>4</sup> and Comrac Liadain<sup>5</sup> syllabic poems are sent as love messages, and this theme is also used in Fingal

1. pp. 16, 20.

2. Comfert CC, Serglige CC .

3. 1.68.

4. 1.190.

5. p.14.



Rónáin, a tale which, although also about 7th century characters, maintains the pagan setting conventional in the older native tales. Here a chance couplet uttered by the hero is capped by his young stepmother as if it were a love message to her<sup>1</sup>. This motif of the verse contest occurs widely with syllabic quatrains<sup>2</sup>. However, in this case Rónán in rage has his son killed. Afterwards, repentant, he laments by his son's body with the same verse<sup>3</sup>:

"Is uar fri clóí ngaithe  
do neoch in-gair Bú Aífe  
iss ed ingaire mada  
cen bú, cen neoch no chara.

Is uar gaeth  
i ndorus tige na llaech  
batar in maine laoich  
bítis etrainn ocus gaíth

"It is cold against the whirlwind for the one who herds Aífe's cows (some standing-stones): this is vain herding, without cows, without the one you love.

The wind is cold in the doorway of the warriors' house:

dear were the warriors who used to be between us and the wind."

His frightened wife interjects a lament of her own, and Rónán brushes her aside in a further quatrain<sup>4</sup>:

1. 1.126 f.

2. CMR I 1.139, Tromd. Guaire 1.1190.

3. 1.168, debide: 2nd verse has 1st line shortened, a syllable lost in 2.3.

4. 1.189, rannaigeacht bec.

"Cotail, a ingen Echach,  
 nídat méra na doene;  
 cid broína-su do brattán  
 ní hé mo maccán chainé."

"Sleep, Eochu's daughter, people are not savages. Though  
 you wet your little cloak it is not my little son you mourn."

His words are immediately proved wrong in the prose, for his  
 son's fosterbrother bursts in and throws at her the severed heads  
 of her family, and she "falls on her knife". Rónán continues with  
 another long lament. Both show the freedom of early syllabic  
 verse to use quatrains of different metres in the one poem.

The tales above, all 9th century, contain only syllabic verse,  
 of various types. The Ulster tale Longes mac nUislenn, however,  
 balances the roscad prophecy of Deirdre's momentous life at the  
 beginning<sup>1</sup> with two syllabic laments by her at the end<sup>2</sup>. These  
 poems can become very long: almost the whole of the extant Aided  
Fhothad Canainne (listed as an Aithed)<sup>3</sup> consists of a syllabic  
 poem(réicne) sung by Fothad's head to the woman whom he had arranged  
 to abduct, telling her how fate had turned against him. From the  
 10th century whole tales are occasionally told in syllabic verse,  
 as well as in prose versions<sup>4</sup>.

Another early use of syllabic metre in tales is in descriptions  
 of the native<sup>5</sup> Otherworld regularly also introduced as speech poems.  
 The earliest example of this is the two long poems which make up

1. (a) ex. (5) p. 119.

2. paras. 17, 18:

3. Fianaigecht K. Meyer 1910 pp. 1-21.

4. ACR = Brinna Ferchertne ZCP III 40; EME Ériu IV 91-111;  
ETB ZCP VIII 261-73, p. 32.

5. See Ch. VII pp 222-4.

most of Imram Brain<sup>1</sup> attributed to the supernatural woman who invites Bran, and to Manannán. As well as the metre, obvious Christian references show that these poems are a monastic development on the echtra theme. The Christian references also appear in other examples<sup>2</sup>, such as one in Tochmarc Étaíne which reads like an interpolation. The Otherworld poems in Serglige Con Culainn<sup>3</sup> contain Middle Irish forms, while in Echtra Laegaire the Otherworld poems seem to have been added in one ms. only, in language slightly later than the prose<sup>4</sup>. It seems that the monastic redactors began a fashion for poems describing the Otherworld in the native echtraí, a fashion satirized in Aislinge Meic Con Glinne, the latest example. In Early Modern Irish tales description of the Otherworld is, like other traditional descriptions, in prose.

As well as composing lyric poems in the syllabic metres, the monastic scholars' main use for them was to record information: history, chronology, or lists. Several tales which otherwise would contain no syllabic verse have this kind of composition added<sup>5</sup>. In some tales the poems which appear are merely extracts from this type of verse, quoted to prove a point - for which purpose it seems verse was deemed more reliable than prose. All the verses in Cath Maige Mucrimé I are of this type. This is probably most

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1. debide with some rannaigecht, paras. 3-30, paras. 33-60.

2. rannaigecht and debide, T. Étaíne (iii) para. 10.

3. debide paras. 31, 33, 34.

4. p. 378, ll. 18, 103 f. debide.

5. ACC I 14065: deaths of Ulstermen; T. Emere para. 92 = names of Ulstermen.



common in 'historical' king tales<sup>1</sup>, but in Tochmarc Étaíne two variant versions of episodes are supported by quatrains, and the trilogy ends with verse corroboration by a senchaid<sup>2</sup>. This use of verse in tales is mainly confined to the Early Irish period, where it has more to do with the gathering of traditional knowledge than with narrative style<sup>3</sup>.

Speech poems in dramatic situations, continuing the roscad tradition, is the most constant use of syllabic verse in tales. For a while in tales which use both types of metre, roscad holds its own in the ritual utterances of ancient heroes, or as the vehicle for vision and prophecy. However even in tales using roscad syllabic poems may appear on these themes: an exhortation beginning Érig a gerait Ulad 'Arise, O warrior of Ulster' in Serglige Con Culainn<sup>4</sup>; a prophecy by an Otherworld warrior in Tochmarc Étaíne<sup>5</sup>; a visionary prophecy of Cú Chulainn (Atchíu fer find firfes cles 'I see a fair man who will perform feats'), possibly replacing a roscad, and another prophecy labelled r in TBC I<sup>6</sup> (all in debide). Both the poems which appear in one version of Compert Conchobair are syllabic prophecies<sup>7</sup> (one

1. Bórama paras 13,36,40; Cog pp.30,32 etc.; EME paras. 17,19 (ends tale); A Dhiarmada pp.75,82 (ends tale).
2. T. Étaíne (i) para. 26, (iii) paras. 21,23.
3. TDG Oss p.154; Caithr Congh paras. I, XLVII (ends tale); CMR II pp.142,146,148,150,166,168; ACR paras. 6,7,8,9,14.
4. para. 30.
5. (i) para. 23.
6. ll. 67, 2372.
7. RC VI 176,177.

called rithoiricc) in ochtfhoclach, the other, a greeting to the newborn child beginning Mochean, in a shortened rannaigecht metre. Other examples of these types in syllabic metre can easily be found<sup>1</sup>.

The other types of syllabic speech poem in later tales are rarely as moving as the earlier examples, though in Buille Shuibhne and the early Finn-cycle tales there is a special place for poems describing nature<sup>2</sup>, sometimes borrowed from earlier tradition<sup>3</sup>. Death and personal tragedy regularly provide a setting for laments<sup>4</sup>. Dialogue poems with quatrains ascribed to alternate speakers are common<sup>5</sup>. With occasional exceptions<sup>6</sup> the number of metres in use tends to be narrowed down to straight debide, rannaigecht and ae freslige in later tales<sup>7</sup>. In Early Modern Irish the verses which appear in tales are generally much looser and less polished metrically than contemporary eulogistic verse, the composition of which by now preoccupied the professional talents of the filid.

A firm tradition of the alternation of prose narrative with speech poems in syllabic verse seems to have been established in the Middle Irish period. Modernized versions of tales had new poems added, from Middle Irish<sup>8</sup> to Early Modern<sup>9</sup>. In tales where

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1. Exhortation: E. Thaidg p.345; prophecy: C. Almaine para. 6, ENC p.150; mochean: FDG 1.363, OCL para.24.
  2. Acall 329; FTC Oss. p.138.
  3. Macgníom Fhinn para 20, Uath Beinne Étair p.130.
  4. T. B. Flidhaise II CR IV 24, ECR1 p.96.
  5. Sc.MMD para. 3; A.Guill & Gairb para 6; CRR I paras. 5,19,22,29; CML paras. 36,40,47; Forb.DD paras. 24,28,31,35,37.
  6. CFD in TBC, much ochtfhoclach.
  7. A. Bruford 1966 p.35 and n.
  8. TBC II, T.Ferbe II.
  9. T. B. Flidhaise II; ACC II; T. Étaíne (ii) II; OCU; CMM II.

every scene<sup>1</sup> or even every paragraph<sup>2</sup> was expected to contain a syllabic laoidh by one of the characters, it is clear that all these verses cannot be at points of high emotion. Quite early a convention appears whereby what has already been told in dialogue or prose narrative is repeated in metrical form<sup>3</sup>. In Aided Muirchertaig the poems regularly repeat and amplify a conversation begun in 'prose'<sup>4</sup>. The purely ornamental nature of these verses is emphasized in the comment of one known poet-author of romances that he added poems to 'grace' his adaptation of EMI since he liked the story<sup>5</sup>. The poems would have a very decorative effect, since, like the syllabic verses which have survived in oral tradition, they were no doubt sung.

However, it is perhaps not surprising that they were not considered a necessity in all later tales. Many never contained them<sup>6</sup>, and many of the poems in Aided Muirchertaig, Oidheadh Con Culainn, (ACCII) and Cath Maige Léna were omitted in later manuscripts. In the later Finn-cycle the verse and prose traditions become quite distinct, with tales told either entirely in prose or entirely in syllabic verse; however usually maintaining the conventional setting established in Acallam na Senórach of a question by St. Patrick and an answer in the first person by Oisín or Caelte.

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1. E. Thaidg, A. Fhinn II.

2. A. Muirchertaig, CML.

3. Serglige CC para. 29; T. Étaíne (iii) para. 5; E. Thaidg pp. 346, 347, 349; T6C II n. 478, 604, 665, 1285 etc.

4. paras. 4, 16, 26.

5. A. Bruford 1966 p. 46.

6. EAC, EMM, ERL.



These Fenian lays survive into oral tradition in Ireland and Scotland. In Scotland the tunes are preserved; in Ireland the lays may be recited with different voices for Oisín and St. Patrick. The motif of capping syllabic verses also survives, usually in anecdotes telling how a poet got the better of some other character<sup>1</sup>. However verses rarely appear in oral tales. Alan Bruford quotes examples from Ireland and Scotland of verses from ECRI, ECG, OCU, OCL<sup>2</sup>, as well as others which seem to have been composed for the tales in oral tradition. In general, apart from literary survivals, any verses appearing are more likely to be related to the jingles which appear in some international popular tales.

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1. LSÍC pp.339,342.

2. 1966 pp.174-178.

## CHAPTER VI

### Description

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### Description VI

A certain amount of description appears even in Old Irish written tales. Things heard, smelt, felt or seen may be noted; but especially the colour, shape and size of objects. Description may consist of nouns and adjectives, often in verbless sentences; but also of comparisons, simile and metaphor, and sometimes of hypothetical statements, giving the result if some particular thing should befall the object of the description.

Descriptions show a special interest in colour. Certain colours had particular significance: a white red-eared animal or green-cloaked woman clearly come from the Otherworld, while an all-red creature is the same with definitely hostile connotations. The richness of Early Irish colour words is illustrated by another motif often used of the glamorous Otherworld, that of things which are cacha datha 'of every colour', sometimes further explained:<sup>1</sup>

..etir glas ocus gorm ocus derg ocus huaine ocus chorcair  
etir dub ocus fhind ocus odhor ocus buidhe, etir brecc  
ocus dond ocus alad ocus ruad;

..both blue (or green, or grey) and dark blue and red and  
bright green and purple, both black and white and dun  
and yellow, both speckled and brown and motley and russet"

This selection indicates some differences between the English and Gaelic sense of colour: glas is very difficult to translate, referring to several different hues in English, while words which in English describe pattern rather than colour appear in other lists of colours.<sup>2</sup>

1. T. Troí II l. 380.

2. Imth. Aen. p. 120; Acall. (Fr.) l. 2803.

The love of bright and diverse colours appears throughout the literature. Black, red and white are often used together<sup>1</sup>, especially associated with carrion birds, blood, and corpses of the battlefield. Ói Chulainn and Conall Cernach have chariot-horses of different colours, not matching pairs.<sup>2</sup> While Ói Chulainn's appearance becomes ever more colourful in later descriptions, Conall himself has eyes, cheeks<sup>3</sup> and brows<sup>4</sup> of different colours. Retainers are often mounted half on horses of one colour, the rest on horses of another.<sup>5</sup> In Aided Guill ocus Gairb a chieftain's retinue wear cloaks of yellow, red, bright green, dark blue, purple and black<sup>6</sup>, and in the Romantic tale Eachtra Chloinne Rígh na hÍoruaidhe a wooden palace and a ship are brightly painted<sup>7</sup>: 'every other plank in that ship was a dark blue plank and a red plank, a bright green plank and a black plank, a yellow plank and a white plank.' Finn's hound Bran is described in orally-preserved Fenian lays<sup>8</sup> as having a white belly, black flanks, yellow legs, green back and red ears. Other strangely coloured animals are described in the earlier prose literature.<sup>9</sup> In early Irish tradition the three disfiguring blisters of 'shame, blemish and reproach' raised by satire were given the colours red, white and

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1. e.g. Lg. § 7, Imr. CM ch. xii, ECRI p. 114, ENC p. 78.

2. FB §§47, 49.

3. FB §47, TEDD §97.

4. TBC St. 4555.

5. TB Dartada § 4 (Eg.), A. Dhiarmada p. 74.

6. §23.

7. pp. 60, 56.

8. e.g. A. MacLellan, Stories from South Uist p. 211.

9. Imr. Brain §15, Merugud Uilix l. 265, A. Fergusa meic Léide II 242.

black or grey (glas).<sup>1</sup> The same colours are also used consecutively of people disfigured by strong emotions, usually shame or fear.<sup>2</sup> This motif is elaborated in the early Modern Irish tale Nuallghubha Oilella Óluim<sup>3</sup> where Oillill becomes white, yellow, dun, hard, black and weak as he hears of the death of successive friends and relations.

These qualities are expressed by means of comparisons: as white as bleached linen, as dun as rich tawny milk, as hard as the handstaff of a corn-kiln. The imagery of Gaelic comparisons is generally homely and direct, and in the early language there is a marked preference for the equative degree of the adjective<sup>4</sup>, expressing an exact equivalent. In formal description, as in Nuallghubha Oilella Óluim, comparisons with the equative, which became obsolescent in the 12th century, are maintained well into Early Modern Irish.<sup>5</sup> After the 15th century comparisons are expressed either with the new equative locution comh... ri, or the comparative of the adjective, sometimes an inverse comparison 'than which snow is no whiter', or a simile. The second and fourth of these also appear earlier. Not every adjective shows an equative form in the early period, and those which do tend to reappear with the same referents. Most of the equative comparisons preserved in the later literature have already become stereotyped at an earlier date.

1. H. Meroney, JCS I 223-4.

2. Altram TDM §6, BCF §4, TTT I. 277, ECC LSS pp. 4-5.

3. SGS VI (1949) 1-10.

4. In -ithir followed by the accusative.

5. O. Bergin, Ériu XIV 140-3; TBC St. Introd. xliii-iv.



Many of the recurring colour-comparisons refer to native plants: as white as white flowers<sup>1</sup> or as bog-cotton<sup>2</sup>, as blue as the bluebell<sup>3</sup>, as red as foxglove<sup>4</sup> or 'purple of the herb of the rock', possibly a dye obtained from a lichen.<sup>5</sup> The conventional European comparison to a red rose does make a late appearance in Gaelic narrative<sup>6</sup>, but alongside the native plants.

Other conventional European comparisons are common in Gaelic literature. 'As white as snow', often 'as one night's snow',<sup>7</sup> as well as 'as white as a swan'<sup>8</sup> are well known. 'As black as (char-)coal', often 'smiths' charcoal doused in cold water' is common, especially in later narratives.<sup>9</sup> The comparison favoured earlier seems to be to a beetle's back.<sup>10</sup> Red things are sometimes compared to blood.<sup>11</sup> However a much more frequent comparison of redness is partaing<sup>12</sup>, an obscure term clearly, <sup>and</sup> from the initial p- of foreign origin. Sometimes things are said to be made of partaing<sup>13</sup>, and one

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1. bánuighther re bánsgoith Fog. CC §18; { NOO §2, BCC GGG p. 72, ENC p. 78 (geal). } p.139 n.3
  2. findithir canach sléibe TBDD §109; T. Ailbhe §5 (geal), ERL p. 121.
  3. glaisithir bugha TBDD §97; TBC St. 1.4556, Acall. 1.6636, T. Treblainne p. 169 (gorm); glas is also used of holly: Prúll.
  4. dergithir sian TBDD §§2, 97; Imth. Aen. 1.1924.
  5. MU II 1.579 samalta re corcair lossa liac; T. Tebe 1.479, BCC GGG p. 72; comderg re corcair chaille 'as red as wood-purple' Acall. 1.6635; deirge agus corcair choilleadh BCF p. 50, may refer to the same plant.
  6. ECRI p. 52, ENC p. 122.
  7. gilithir snechta oenaidchi TBDD §2, T. Ferbe 1.43; ECRI p. 64, CNC p. 78.
  8. gilithir géis T. Ailbhe §5; TBF §9, TBC St. 1.4636.
  9. duibithir gual ngoibnidi T. Ailbhe §5, nír dhuibhe sengual soileach arna bháthadh a n-uisce 'no blacker was old willow-charcoal doused in water' Caithr. Congh. p. 126; ECRI p. 64, TGD p. 259. than?
  10. duibithir druimne daeill TBDD §§2, 97; BDC §33, FTC Oss. p. 124.
  11. smail fuil Lg. §7; FTC Oss. p. 124, CNC 1.47.
  12. dergithir partaing TBDD §2, FDG 1.687, BCF p. 51, ECRI p. 52.
  13. TB Fr. §9, TBC I 1.34.

suggestion is that it is borrowed from Parthica and means 'Parthian leather dyed scarlet'.<sup>1</sup> Another persistent stereotyped comparison in Gaelic tradition, this time of tone rather than colour, is the equally obscure binnithir téta mendchrot 'as sweet as the strings of (?) harps', sometimes expanded 'constantly played in the hands of sages' allámaib suad oca sírsheinn.<sup>2</sup> Mendchrot only appears in comparisons.

These examples show the traditionalism of Gaelic imagery, comparisons of size and shape again show its directness. Things are as big as 'one of the great trees which are on the green of a great fort'<sup>3</sup> or 'a fídhell board'<sup>4</sup> or 'a reaping basket'<sup>5</sup>. Things are 'as tall as a ship's mast'<sup>6</sup> or 'as high as a lark goes on a beautiful windless day'<sup>7</sup> or 'as long as the front spout of a bellows'<sup>8</sup>. One image which also appears in the Bible is 'as long as a weaver's beam'<sup>9</sup>.

Comparisons of speed generally refer to animals and birds: hawks, swallows, startled deer as well as to the wind.<sup>10</sup> Some of the traditional referents here are also obscure, such as cliabhach,

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1. W. Stokes, IT 111 222.

2. TBC II 1.4340, Acall. 4080, TB Flidhaise II CR II 100, BCF p. 51.

3. TBC LL 1.1581.

4. FB. Eg. §91.

5. TBDD §§58, 97.

6. TBC I 1.1960, ECRI pp. 102, 134, ENC p. 141.

7. TBC I 1.3612.

8. Amairgen Prúll

9. TBDD §§61, 128.

10. TBC I 1.2949; Acall. Fr. 1.6057; Forb. DD §§21, 96; TGD p. 262.

fiamhain and iara: this last probably a marten rather than a weasel, since it climbs trees.<sup>1</sup> Traditional metaphoric kennings for heroes frequently refer to animals, both native and once so: bears, bulls, hounds and stags; and exotic: lions, dragons, griffins. One strange example is nathair 'a serpent' which is a native word, although there are no snakes in Ireland, so that the term must have been preserved in some such context as this since the Goidelic invasion. These kennings are found not only in tales but also in Bardic poetry.

#### Traditional Descriptive Passages: 'Runs'

The Middle Irish redactions in which many older Gaelic prose tales appear in manuscripts frequently contain quite long descriptive passages on fixed themes: the heroes and their accoutrements, their horses and chariots, their preparations for battle, their womenfolk, and also feasting in magnificent halls. Similar passages appear in modern oral tradition in both Scotland and Ireland. The written versions have generally been unpopular with modern editors; for example D. MacKinnon<sup>2</sup>:

"This is the first of several rhetorical passages in this manuscript, too common in other Gaelic compositions, old and modern. ... While such passages testify to the copiousness of the language and to the great command over the Gaelic vocabulary which many native authors undoubtedly possessed, they not infrequently mar the literary beauty of many of these sagas and detract from their historical value."<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, G. Murphy says 'Description of the ceremony of court life, of the interior of palaces, and of the ornament of clothes and weapons,

1. TGG p. 46, ENC p. 31.

2. TB Flidaise II, CR II 206.

3. The modern oral examples are generally referred to in English as 'runs' (LF p. 209, W&S IV 151, MWHT IXv) which I have used in the title of this thesis as a convenient if vague term for the whole genre. See Bruford 1966 p. 36 for a full discussion.



is universal in heroic literature'.<sup>1</sup> A. B. Lord<sup>2</sup> remarks on the importance of 'descriptions of heroes, horses, arms and castles' in assessing the quality of an 'oral epic tradition'. Despite their absence from much of the oldest written stratum of the literature, some of the Gaelic descriptions seem to hark back to a tradition older than writing. The most remarkable of these is the account of the Celtic war-chariot, no longer in use in historic Ireland.

The special character of the long descriptive passages is acknowledged in native terminology by a technical term tuarascbál, literally 'describing'. B. Mac Cana has noted marginal t used beside a chariot-description much as r might be used to mark a stressed metre poem<sup>3</sup>, and the word appears in full as a heading to some examples: Tuarascbál charpait <sup>delba</sup> Con Culaind annso 'Here is the Description of Cú Chulainn's <sup>chariot</sup> form'.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes the word tuarascbál is introduced into the text leading up to a description: nírbo segunda a thuarascbál 'his description was not genteel', followed by a description of an ogre<sup>5</sup>; ba h-áluinn an inis sin trá agus ba h-amra a thuarascbál 'beautiful then was that island and its description was wonderful' (description follows)<sup>6</sup>; agus fa hí so thuarascbál na bruidní .i. 'and this was the description of the hall i. e. ...' (description follows).<sup>7</sup>

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1. G. Murphy, *Saga and Myth* (1961) p. 27.

2. *The Singer of Tales* (1960) p. 86.

3. *Celtica* VII 71.

4. TBC I CFD 2941, BIM 2335.

5. FB § 37.

6. Imr. CG § 52.

7. Altram TDM § 3.

Tuarascbál is rarely used with the type of descriptive passage most popular in later tales, where instead of static scenes of places and people actions such as arming, fighting, hunting and travelling are described. An alternative term córuhadh 'arrangement' can be found from the 13th century on, for example introducing the description of a man<sup>1</sup> or of a hideous hag<sup>2</sup>. One manuscript of the Romantic tale Eachtra Chonaill Ghulba<sup>3</sup> gives two descriptions of a battle, with the comment: Ag so córuhadh eile air an gcath céadna, toig do rogha dhíobh 'Here is another 'arrangement' of the same battle, take your pick of them'.<sup>3</sup> Córu catha, literally 'arrangement of a battle', survives as a general term for descriptive passages in Irish oral tradition, along with culaidh ghaisce 'battle-dress', which must have originally referred to the arming description.<sup>4</sup> In Scotland the term was ruith or siubhal<sup>5</sup>, approximating to the English folk-tale term 'run'.

#### (1) Descriptions of People

As is likely with a heroic literature, such as that cultivated in early Ireland, most of the characters described in the early tales are warriors. These descriptions may vary in length, but the content, though not the language, is fairly fixed: physical

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1. Acall. 4201, Rawlinson MS.

2. Caithr. Thoir p. 104.

3. A. Bruford 1966 p. 43 n. 19.

4. J. Delargy 1945 p. 34n.

5. ROBERT I xv n. 1.

appearance (especially hair colour), followed by clothing and then weapons. A typical example is that of the man who comes to help Cú Chulainn in Táin Bó Cualnge, at the beginning of the 16th century episode Breslech Maige Muirthemne<sup>1</sup>:

- (1) "Dia mbai Laég and conacca ní, in n-oénfer dar fiartharsna in dúnaid fer n-érend anairtuaid cach ndíriuch ina dochum. 'Oénfer sund chucund innossa, a Chúcán,' or Laég. 'Cinmas fir andsin?' or Cú Chulaind. 'Ní handsa. Fer caín mór and dano. Berrad lethan laiss. Folt casbude fair. Brat uanide i forcipol immi. Cassán gelaigít isin brot úassa bruinne. Léne de sról ríq fo derg-andliud do dergór i custul fri gelchmes co glúinib dó. Dub-sciath co calathbúali findruini fair. Sleg cóicrind ina láim. Foga fogablaigi inna farrad. Ingnad ém reb ocus ábairt ocus adabair dogní, acht ní saig nech fair ocus ní saig-seom for nech, feib nachas falced nech hé.' 'Is fir sin, a daltán,' for sé, 'cia dom chártib síthcaire-sa sein...'"

"While Laég was there he saw something, a lone man coming straight towards him from the north-east across the camp of the men of Ireland. 'A lone man is coming towards us now, little Cú,' said Laég. 'What sort of man is there?' said Cú Chulaind. 'Not difficult, a big handsome man with a broad haircut, curly yellow hair on him, a greenish cloak gathered up round him, a brooch of white silver in the cloak over his breast, a shirt of kingly satin with red embroidery of red gold next to his white skin to his knees, carrying a black shield with a hard rim of white bronze, a five-pronged spear in his hand, a forked javelin next to it. Wonderful indeed is the game and sport and play he makes, but no one attacks him and he attacks no one, as if no one saw him.' 'That is true, my fosterling,' said he. 'That is one of my otherworld friends...'"

The motif of invisibility shows that the visitor is from the Otherworld.<sup>2</sup>

Another example, also from Táin Bó Cualnge, gives the character's physical appearance in greater detail<sup>3</sup>:

- (2) "Tanic buiden aili ann didiu isin telaig oc Slemin Midi,' or Mac Roth. 'Is toichim sluaig ar méit. Tóiseach fil i

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1. TBC I 2090-8.

2. MU II 11.561, 623.

3. TBC I 3689-703.



n-airinach na buidne sin, ní coimdig laéach bad chaíne  
 itir delb ocus timthach ocus decelt. Folt tobach  
 dergbuidí fair, gnúis chóir corra chutromae. Aged  
 focaél forlethan, beóil derga thanaidí, det níanda  
 némonnda, guth glan gleórda, cuinsiu chain corcarda  
 chumachtach. Aillem do delbaib doíne. Brat corra  
 hi forcibul imbi, bretnas fo a llécor de ór uasa  
 bánbruindib. Cuarsciath co tuagmílaib illdathacha co  
 cobroth aircid huasa clíu. Gaí fota faéburglas la  
 foga féig fobartach ina láim, claideb órduirn óir fora  
 main, léne culpatach co ndergindled imbi i custul.  
 'Cia sin, a Fhergais?' or Ailill. 'Ro fhetamar immorro,'  
 or Fergus, 'is leth gliad ém,' or sé, 'da-dánic and, is  
 cláriud comlaind, is lonbruth érchon; Rochaid mac  
 Faithemain ó Bríg Dumae far cliamain insin ..'."

"Another company has come now onto the little hill in  
 Slemain Mide," said Mac Roth. 'It is the approach of  
 a host from its size. He is a chieftain who is in the  
 forefront of that company; rarely is there a warrior  
 more beautiful, in form and clothing and raiment.  
 Cropped red-yellow hair on him, a fitting crimson well-  
 proportioned countenance. A face narrow below, broad  
 above; thin red lips; shining pearly teeth; a clear  
 bright voice; a beautiful crimson shapely visage. He  
 is most beautiful of human form. A purple cloak  
 gathered up around him, a brooch with its full ornament of  
 gold over his white breast, a curved shield with many-  
 coloured arching animals and a boss of silver above his  
 left side. A long blue-edged spear with a keen  
 aggressive javelin, a sword with a golden hilt of gold on  
 his back, a hooded shirt with red embroidery close about  
 him.' 'Who is that, Fergus?' said Ailill. 'I know indeed,'  
 said Fergus, 'he who came there is half a battle, he  
 is the dividing of a combat, he is the fierce heat of a  
 slaughter-hound. That is Rochaid mac Faithemain from Bríg  
 Dumae, your son in law ..'."

In most cases such a detailed description of physical beauty is only  
 given to the hero of a tale<sup>1</sup>, especially if he is a king, in accordance  
 with the convention that the ideal king is physically as well as  
 morally perfect.<sup>2</sup> However, like the heroes in some other tales,  
 Rochaid's main role in TBC is that of a suitor, and this may be why  
 his looks are described here.

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1. Cú Chulainn, Siaburchat LU 1.9265; Fraech, TB Fr. §17; Maine,  
T. Ferbe 1.37; Cearbhall, BCF §11.

2. Cormac Con Longes, BDC §46; Cormac mac Airt, E. Chormaic §3.

Details of physical appearance are almost always included in descriptions of women. Togail Bruidne Da Derga opens with a picture of the hero's ancestress, Étaín, washing at a spring. If nothing else her green clothing indicates her Otherworld origin:<sup>1</sup>

- (3) "Buí rí amra airegda for Érin, Eochaid Feidleach a ainm. Do-luid feachtus n-ann dar aenach mBreg Léith, co n-accai in mnaí for ur in tobair ocus cír chuirréil argit co n-ecor de ór acthe oc folcud a lluing argit, ocus ceithri h-eóin óir furri ocus gleorgemai beccai di charrmogul chorcraí hi forfhleascuib na luingi. Brat cas corcra fo loí chain aicthe. Dualldai airgdidi ecoirside de ór oibinniu isin bratt. Léne leburchulpatach isí chotutlemon dei sítiu uainide fo derg-inliud óir impi. Tuagmíla ingantai di ór ocus airget fora bruindi ocus a formnaib ocus a guallib isind léne di cach leith. Taitned fria in grian co bba forderg dona feraib túidhleach ind óir frisin ngréin asin títiu uainidi. Da trilis n-órbuidi fora cind. Fige ceithri ndual ceachtar ndé ocus mell for rind cach duail. Ba cosmail leó dath ind fhoilt-sin fri barr n-ailestair hi samrad nó fri derg-ór iar ndénam a datha.

"There was a wonderful excellent king over Ireland, whose name was Eochaid Feidleach. Once upon a time he came across the assembly-ground of Brí Léith and saw a woman at the edge of the spring, with a bright (?) silver comb with ornament of gold, washing her hair in a silver vessel with four birds of gold on it, and small bright gems of purple carbuncle on the rims of the vessel. She had a curly purple cloak with a beautiful fleece. Silver filigree brooches (?) decorated with pleasing gold in the cloak. She wore a long hooded shirt, stiff and smooth, of bright-green silk with embroidery of red gold. Wonderful arching animals of gold and silver on the shirt on her breast and her shoulders and her shoulder-blades on each side. The sun was shining on her so that the men could see clearly<sup>2</sup> the glittering of the gold against the sun from the green silk. Two golden-yellow tresses on her head, each of them a braiding of four plaits, with a bead at the end of each plait. They thought the colour of that hair was like the flower of the flag-iris in summer or like red gold that has been polished.

The description continues with the woman undoing her hair to wash it, with her arms through the neck opening of her dress, so that her body is visible. Her arms are as white as snow, her cheeks red as foxglove,

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1. So also A. Muirchertaig para. 2, EAC para. 5.

2. Reading 'airdeirc', Me2 & Me3 p.125.

her brows as black as a beetle, her teeth like a shower of pearls, her eyes as blue as a bluebell, her lips as red as partaing. These conventional comparisons are regularly used in descriptions of people to refer to the same parts of the body.<sup>1</sup> Her shoulders, fingers, side white as foam and soft like wool, thighs, small round knees, straight shins and heels are then described in short sentences with **adjectival epithets**. She has the 'bright blush of the moon' in her face, a proud lift to her brows, a ray of loveliness in each eye and a dimple of pleasure in each cheek, alternately coloured with the redness of calf's blood and the whiteness of snow. She has a soft voice and a graceful gait:

- (3b) Ba sí trá as caemeam ocus as áildeam ocus as córam  
ad-conmarcadar súili dóine de mnáib domain. Ba dóig  
leó beo a sídaib dí. Ba fíra as-breth: cruth cách  
co hÉtaín. Caem cách co hÉtaín."

She, then, was the loveliest and most beautiful and most perfect that the eyes of men had seen of the women of the world. They thought she must be from the otherworld mounds. It was regarding her it was said: All are shapely till Étaín. All are lovely till Étaín."

### Physical Appearance

This is one of the longest of all descriptions of people, but the same detail of physical appearance is also found in other descriptions of women.<sup>2</sup> Many descriptions, both of men and women, include their being the 'most beautiful of humankind'.<sup>3</sup> They provide an opportunity

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1. Men: Siaburchat CC LU 1.9272, T. Ferbe 1.37, FDG 1.576, Imth. Aen. 1.1924, Acall. 6635, E. Chormaic §5, ECF §11, CNC p. 47, MNC p. 78.  
Women: FTC (Oss.) p. 124, ECRI p. 52, ENG p. 122, EGF p. 38.
2. TBC II 1.185, HME §15, Aisl. MC I p. 97, EAC §5, ECRI p. 52, EDC §18 (p. 325n.).
3. Men: Prúll, T. Troí I 1.31847, FTC 1.74, TIT 1.3935; women: A. Muirchertaig §2, Forb. DD §20, EAD §20.



for constructing the early Irish ideal of physical beauty.

Physical stature is admired, as implied in ex. (1) fér cáin mór: in other examples the warrior is said to be taller than anyone else.<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere in Táin Bó Cúalnge Rocha mac Faithemain is distinguished by being head and shoulders above his companions<sup>2</sup>; a motif which appears in other tales<sup>3</sup>, and persists to oral tradition in Scotland<sup>4</sup>. In Aislinge Oenguso<sup>5</sup> it is used of the hero's Otherworld sweetheart.

Fair or golden is the preferred hair-colour, as in the examples quoted. For Otherworld people, and women, this never varies (though women's eyebrows are always black), but men may also have red, black or brown hair, especially when a contrast is needed.<sup>6</sup> The international motif<sup>7</sup> of black, red and white colouring for the hero's hair, cheeks, and skin appears earliest in Irish<sup>8</sup>, but although the actual colours are favourites in Gaelic description black-haired heroes are the exception in manuscript tales.<sup>9</sup> Skin, however, is always white.

1. FDG 1.575, FTC §74.

2. TBC I 1.1667.

3. T. Troí I 1.32333.

4. Deirdire p. 52.

5. §8.

6. FDG 1.715 ff. 3 young men red-haired, fair, and brown-haired; Caithr. Congh. p. 14 one warrior red-haired, the other fair.

7. 265. 1.1\*.

8. Lg. §7, in Deirdire p. 36.

9. BCF §§5, 11.

The triangular face, 'broad above and narrow below' is that familiar from early Celtic representations of the human head. The line aised fochael forlethan from ex. (2) is stereotyped: it occurs three times in descriptions in TBC I, of Fedelm the woman-seer and the Ulster king Conchobar<sup>1</sup>; elsewhere of Conchobar's son Cormac Con Longes<sup>2</sup> and the Connaught hero Fraech<sup>3</sup>. Complexion is often described as corera/corcarda 'purple'; possibly 'rich-blooded', but probably just 'bright'. Cheeks and lips are red, and the line beóil derga thanaidi (ex. (2)) also recurs, mainly in descriptions of women.<sup>4</sup> Blushing and dimples seem to be favoured for both sexes: Conaire's companions blush<sup>5</sup> and Cú Chulainn's dimples are coloured<sup>6</sup>. A pleasant voice is much mentioned, and this is the traditional subject of the comparison binnithir téta mendchrot.<sup>7</sup>

Another type of description appearing in early Irish tales is the warrior and entourage.<sup>8</sup> Fraech's array, as he goes to visit Ailill and Medb, is provided by his aunt, the goddess of the Boyne:<sup>9</sup>

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1. 11. 27, 3141.

2. TBDD §75, BDC §46.

3. TB Fr. §17.

4. TBC II 1.188, Aisl. MC I p. 97, EAC §5, T. Étaíne (11) II §4, E. Laegsaire p. 380.

5. TBDD §99; women Fog. CC §18, Sc. oral Deirdire p. 24.

6. TBC I BMM 1.2356. Also: a young warrior, BMM p. 6; woman, Aisl. MC II p. 97.

7. Women: TBC II 195, ENC p. 122; men: TBC II 4329, Acall. 1.6830 Fr., BCF §11.

8. TBC I 1.7, TB Dart. §4, Sc. Cano §4; TBC II 1.157, T Ferbe 1.1, Cophar II pp. 238, 239; BDC §§8-10, 44-45; A. Dhiarmada p. 74.

9. TB Fr. §3.



- (4) "Ocus dobert cóicait mbratt ngorm, ocus ba cosmail  
cech aé fri druimne ndóile. Ocus cetheora oa dubglassa  
for cech brutt. Ocus mílech derggóir la cech mbratt.  
Ocus lénti bángéla co tuagmílaib óir impu. Ocus cóica  
sciath n-argdide co n-imlib. Ocus caindel ríghthigi i  
lláim cech aé ocus cóica senmand findruine ar cech n-aé.  
Cóica toracht di ór forloiscthi im cech n-aé. Eirmitiuda  
di charmmocul fóib anís, ocus is di lecaib lógmairib a  
n-airíarn. No lastais in aidche amal betís ruithni gréni.  
Ocus cóica claideb n-órduim leo, ocus gabor boeglas fo  
shuidi cech fir ocus beilge óir friu. Maélland arggait co  
clucíníu óir fo brágit cech eich. Cóica acraim corcra  
co snáthib argait estib, co síblaib óir ocus argait ocus co  
cendmílaib. Cóica echlasc findruine co mbaccán órda for  
cinn cech aé. Ocus secht mílchoin i slabradaib argait ocus  
ubull n-óir eter cech n-aé. Bróca crédumai impu. Noco  
rabi dath nád beth intib. Mófesser cornaire leo co cornaib  
órdaib ocus argdidib, co n-étaigib íldathachaib, co mongaib  
órdaib sídbudib, co lennaib étrachtaib. Bátor trí drúith  
remib co mindaib argdidib fo díor. Scéith co fethul  
chonduala la cech n-aé, co círbachlaib, co n-esnadaib crédumai  
iarna toébaib. Triar cruittire co n-écosc rígh im cech n-aé."

"And she gave fifty dark blue cloaks and each one was like a beetle's back. And four dark grey corners on each cloak. And an animal brooch of red gold with each cloak. And bright white shirts with arching animals of gold around them. And fifty silvered shields with grims. And a 'candle of a king's house' in each man's hand and fifty rivets of white bronze on each one. Fifty coils of refined gold round each one. Points of carbuncle under them, and their 'front irons' were of precious stones. They used to shine in the night as if they were sunbeams. And they had fifty gold-hilted swords, and a grey horse under each man, with bits of gold. A silver peytrel with little bells of gold under each horse's neck. Fifty purple saddles (?) with silver threads from them, with clasps of gold and silver and with animal terminals. Fifty horsewhips of white bronze with golden hooks over each one's handle. And fifty greyhounds in silver chains, with an apple of gold between each one. They wore bronze leggings. There was no colour that would not be on them. With them were seven horn players with silver and golden horns, with many-coloured clothing, with golden long yellow manes, with splendid cloaks. There were three fools (or druids?) before them wearing silver diadems with gilding. Each one had a shield with engraved insignia, with crested rods, with bronze insertions on their sides. Three harpers each dressed like a king."

The presence of every colour is a typical feature of Otherworld splendour.

The motif of carbuncles shining in the dark must derive ultimately from Isidore of Seville<sup>1</sup> but is regularly associated with the Irish Otherworld.

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1. Lib. Etymologiarum XVI<sup>iv</sup>, J. Carney 1955 p. 82.



### The Introduction of Descriptions

Three of the examples given above occur at or near the beginning of a tale or episode; all three (exx. (1) (3) (4)) associated with the motif of the Otherworld visitor, often used to open a tale. The rich description would provide an evocative introduction to the story to come.

It is characteristic of Otherworld people to appear out of nowhere<sup>1</sup> and in ex. (1) the appearance of Lug to Laeg is expressed with a proleptic accusative pronoun and a definite noun-object: co n-acca ní, in n-oénfer. According to J. Carney<sup>2</sup> this construction is used with deliberate dramatic intention 'to anticipate something strange, mystic or startling.' It is also used with the verb 'to hear', as when introducing the brief description of the wailing Otherworld women who carry Fraech away<sup>3</sup>; and the analogous passive formula con cloth ní 'something was heard' is used to introduce mantic or obscure speech.<sup>4</sup> As C. O'Rahilly points out,<sup>5</sup> in Middle Irish the proleptic accusative becomes regular in introducing descriptions. She would see it as merely a matter of syntax, a form used when the object of the verb of perception is a long phrase or phrases. I find it hard to believe that there is not some stylistic consideration involved.

1. e.g. T. Étaíne (iii) § 1.

2. 1955 p. 301.

3. TB Fr. § 20.

4. P. Mac Cana, *Celtica* VII 87.

5. *Celtica* VIII 166.

The introduction to the description of Étaín (ex. (3)) does not use the proleptic accusative pronoun, though she is still in mnaí 'the/this woman', and the article may be used for stylistic emphasis. Reactions to her appearance from the spectators in the tale are expressed: 'They thought she must be from the Otherworld mounds', 'They thought the colour of that hair was like the flower of the flag-iris'. Very often dar le is used to express the reactions of a speaker in the tale, the spectators or even the audience to whom it is told: Indar latt ba fross do némannaib boí ina bélaib .i. a fiaclai 'You would think it was a shower of pearls within her lips, that is, her teeth.'<sup>1</sup> The conventional descriptive imagery is often enlivened by being attributed to some person involved, in this way.

The most dramatic presentation of a description is the 'watchman' device, used in examples (1) and (2), where one character recites the tuarascbál to another, who identifies it from his account. This has often been held to be a borrowing from the classics<sup>2</sup>; indeed J. Carney classes it with 'The External Element in Irish Saga'. As well as the *Iliad*<sup>3</sup>, which would not have been known in Ireland, Carney quotes examples from Statius' *Thebaid*, Beowulf and Eilhart's *Tristan*. However none of these can be the source of something that was very freely used in early Irish with the long native type of description; and, on balance, a manuscript source seems unlikely for something so

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1. *TBC* I l. 35.

2. M. Dillon, *Early Irish Literature* p. 15; J. Carney 1955 p. 305.

3. Book III.

much more at home in oral recitation, where different voices and expression could be used for the different characters. I think it is better regarded as a native development, in Ireland as in Homer, making use of the Gaelic preference for direct speech. The watchman device falls out of use in Early Modern Irish<sup>1</sup>, though appearing as an archaism in one late Ulster cycle tale.<sup>2</sup>

Another feature of the presentation of descriptions of people in early tales, which disappears in Early Modern Irish, is the grouping together of them in series. The description of Rochaid mac Faithemain, ex. (2), is the ninth in such a series, which usually describe approaching warriors. In the simplest cases the series is no more than a threefold division of the hero's retinue: into warriors, women, and boys<sup>3</sup> or warriors, women, and poets, followed by the hero.<sup>4</sup> In Táin Bó Cúalnge<sup>5</sup> three companies of Cormac Conlonges' retinue are described approaching Cruachu, with Cormac himself in the third. In TBC I the three descriptions show a definite progression: the hair and the shirts become longer, and the cloaks brighter, from speckled, to dark grey, to purple in the third company. The suspense is increased (most clearly in TBC II) by a use of the watchman device: as the people see each company they ask, 'Is that Cormac?', and Medb says no, until the third appears. In Fled Bricrend<sup>6</sup> the three Ulster warriors

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1. FTC 1.74, Caithr. Thoir p. 14 are exceptions.

2. CNC p. 47.

3. Sc. Cano §4.

4. BDC §§44-46.

5. I 1.7, II 1.157.

6. §§44-52.



Laegaire Buadach, Conall Cernach and Cú Chulainn are described by Findabair to Medb, who identifies them, not only with their names, but with a roscad acknowledging their prowess (and a prose explanation of the roscad). When she reaches Cú Chulainn she says Is banna ria frais ón trá 'That, then is a drop before a shower'. These threefold scenes in ascending order increase the dramatic tension, like the threefold repetition of folk-tales.

This descriptive section of FB has its own title 'Tochim Ulad co Cruachnaib Aí 'The Approach of the Ulstermen to Cruachain Aí.' Tochim seems to be used as a technical term for these scenes, and the section of TBC from which ex. (2) is taken is titled Tochim na mBuiden 'The Approach of the Companies'.<sup>1</sup> In Middle Irish tochim becomes synonymous with tuarascbál: Ní raibe ar doman ingen bud chaíme tochim na tuaruscbáil iná sí 'There was no girl in the world of more lovely description than she', followed by a description.<sup>2</sup>

Tochim na mBuiden is a much longer series, and the number of descriptions fluctuates: twenty-one descriptions in TBC I, one of these changed and one absent in TBC II<sup>3</sup>, twenty-nine descriptions in TBC Stowe, including one of three siege-engines.<sup>4</sup> Táin Bó Cúalnge has another series, Fuile Cethirn 'Cethern's Wounds'<sup>5</sup> in which Cethern describes and Cú Chulainn identifies his assailants. There is a series of thirteen descriptions in the later version of Mesca Ulad.<sup>6</sup>

1. TBC I 3097.

2. EME §14, also FTC Oss. p. 122; TTT 11.1152, 6281, 6621.

3. L.4291 f.

4. TBC St. L.4447 f, L.4591.

5. TBC I L.2784 f. 12 groups; II L.3667 f. 9 groups. FC.

6. 11.518-786.

In Togail Bruidne Da Derga in YBL there are twenty-seven descriptions of Conaire's followers in Da Derga's hall, apparently combined from two earlier versions of the tale. However fourteen further descriptions have been added by hand H in the LU version, making this the longest series of all, with forty-one descriptions.<sup>1</sup>

In these long series the repeated question and answer of the watchman device gains a new function, to bind the whole series into a coherent whole. In Táin Bó Cúalnge each description has the same opening sentence; Ailill asks Fergus to identify the warrior and Fergus replies with his name and kennings. In Mesca Ulad each description is introduced, Unsea riusan anair anechtair, 'Lo, next to them, beyond them, from the east', and the identification scene includes Ailill, Medb, and Cú Ruí<sup>2</sup>:

"'Is ríгда in tuarascbáil' ar Medb. 'Is ríгда in lucht issa tuarascbáil' bar Cú Ruí. 'Ced ón, cia sut?' bar Ailill. 'Ní h-annsa', bar Cú Ruí ... "

"'The description is kingly', said Medb. 'The folk whose description it is are kingly' said Cú Ruí. 'What then, who is that?' said Ailill. 'Easily told', said Cú Ruí ... "

This conversation is repeated with different epithets throughout. A few shorter descriptive series appear in early Modern Irish tales.<sup>3</sup>

#### Dress and Equipment

The mention of the long descriptive series must illustrate

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1. §§ 75-139 LU.

2. MU II 1.545.

3. C. Cúla Drenne pp. 7a-8a; CRR II §§ 23-26; TB Flidhaise II CR II 208, 212-222, 302.

how numerous the descriptions of people are in early Irish literature. Descriptions in series are deliberately varied from each other, and there are many different details of hairstyle, dress and weaponry. The descriptions quoted form a representative sample. Many of the details cannot now be translated precisely: the type of comb called cír cuirréil (3), dualldai apparently from dual 'a tress' (3); the airiarn on a spear and círbachaill on a shield (4); acrann (4) normally means 'shoe'. The exact sort of decoration implied by indled (1, 2, 3), ecor (2, 3), esnaid (4) and conduala (4) is also lost in time. However the basic items vary little, and have been taken as providing a realistic picture of dress in the Irish Iron Age.<sup>1</sup> Information about Irish dress in the historic period has also been collected by H. F. McClintock<sup>2</sup> using translations of the native descriptions, depictions of people in native religious art, and accounts and illustrations prepared by foreign observers from the 12th century on.

### Hairstyle

The descriptions use a great many terms for male hairstyles<sup>3</sup>, including metaphors from vegetation (dosbile 'a great bushy tree'<sup>4</sup>) and clothing (forthí 'overmantle'<sup>5</sup>).<sup>6</sup> Words originally referring to

1. K. Jackson 1964 p. 15.

2. Old Irish and Highland Dress, Dundalk 1950.

3. e.g. BDC § 44.

4. TBDD § 97, FB § 91.

5. TBC II 1.158.

6. C. O'Rahilly, 'Words Descriptive of Hair in Irish', Éigse VIII 177-80.



cutting or baldness seem to have been transferred to actual styles: berrad (1), tobach (2), and mael, 'baldness', can all be used where the hair reaches the shoulders.<sup>1</sup> In some cases mael and compounds seem to refer to a crest of hair.<sup>2</sup> A very common term is mong 'mane'. It seems clear that long luxuriant hair was the most admired. Eochu Rond<sup>3</sup> has a 'fair yellow mane' (mong findbuidhe) which hangs down onto his horse's sides, and Cú Chulainn returning from his Boyhood Deeds has fifty locks (airla) of yellow hair between one ear and the other.<sup>4</sup> In one of the late Ulster cycle romances<sup>5</sup> Fer Diad has long fair hair in coils (cuach) to his belt. Long hair was cultivated by the Irish nobility until very late; it is admired in bardic poetry and commented on by foreign observers.<sup>6</sup>

In the earlier descriptions the mature warriors are often represented as wearing beards, usually degablach 'forked',<sup>7</sup> occasionally reaching to the navel.<sup>8</sup> Beards are little mentioned later.<sup>9</sup>

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1. TBC I 11.16, 3146, 3388.

2. TBC II 11.3667, 3688; MU II 1.688.

3. Lg. DD 1.89.

4. TBC II 1.1203; also Acall. 4080 Fr., 4942.

5. CNC p. 74.

6. McClintock pp. 42, 73.

7. TBC II 11.4926, 4311, 4329, 4459; MU II 11.526, 562, 581.

8. TBC I 1.2712 (Fergus); T. Troí I 1.32333.

9. But see Acall. Fr. 11.380, 3638; BDC §46; Caithr. Congh. p. 14.

One other description of a woman<sup>1</sup> mentions her long hair in plaits, as in ex. (3), the style accepted by Professor Jackson.<sup>2</sup> In most cases there is no indication how women's hair was worn.

Depictions of Christ and the evangelists in ecclesiastical illuminated manuscripts of Irish origin, like the early 9th century Book of Kells, regularly have flowing curly hair and beards, but these are probably based on Eastern specifications rather than current native notions of beauty. However, it is perhaps significant that the saints depicted on the early 12th century shrine of St. Maedhóc show the men with long hair crimped in various ways and with forked beards, and the women with two long plaits or ringlets. Their costume is also consistent with the tuarascbála (see below) which may indicate that the fashions described were still fairly close to reality in the 12th century, whatever their earlier origin.<sup>3</sup>

### Clothing

The basic articles of dress for both men and women seem to be a cloak and brooch worn over a long tunic or shirt. This costume, with some distinctive details, also seems to be represented on ecclesiastical sculpture and metalwork from the tenth to twelfth centuries.

### The Cloak

The usual word for 'cloak' in the descriptions, as in the

1. TBC I l. 36.

2. 1964 p. 15.

3. H. McClintock op.cit. p. 6, Illustr. no. 8.

examples given, is brat. Occasionally other words apparently denoting a similar overgarment are used: lend<sup>1</sup>, tí<sup>2</sup>, and fuan, worn by kings and chief warriors only.<sup>3</sup> The material, if mentioned, is almost always wool: the phrase fo ló chain (ex. (3)) recurs and the adjectives lómar 'fleecy', and cas 'curly', are common. The colour is always given, and in early descriptions the whole range of bright colours is used, though corcra, borrowed from purpura, seems the most favoured, as in (2), (3). It is the only colour found with the fuan, usually combined with another alliterating epithet: cas, cortharach 'fringed', cetharbennach 'four cornered', cóic-diabhail 'five-folded', as in (3). Later the use of corcra and another alliterating epithet becomes almost formulaic for the cloak, though there is another formula for a green cloak brat uaine aendatha 'a bright green self-coloured cloak'.<sup>4</sup> The decoration implied by corrtharach is unclear; another frequent epithet cimsach also means 'fringed' or 'bordered'. Some cloaks also have tassels luban.<sup>5</sup>

Fr. Shaw in a careful article<sup>6</sup> has investigated the shape and manner of wearing of the cloak. The epithet cetharbennach

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1. TBDD §§95, 112, 116, 118 etc., mostly in that part of the series interpolated in IU; MU II 11.526, 702.

2. A. Dhiarmada p. 74, Cophar II 1.136.

3. TBC I 1.3595 Conchobar, 1.2355 Cú Chulainn (BMM); T. Étaíne (iii) §1: Midir; T. Troí I 1.3233 Hector; BDC §46: Cormac Conlonges.

4. Acall 1.4942, EAC §5, TDL I §4.

5. A. Dhiarmada p. 74, ex. (8) below combined with buttons in one late example: G. Gúla Dremne p. 7b.

6. Ériu XVI 200-204.



implies the garment was quadrangular, and several early descriptions mention decorated corner-pieces (oa 'ears', as in ex. (4)). The cloak of later illustrations seems to have been semicircular. The obscure phrase i forcipul (exx. (1), (2)) is used only of cloaks, regularly in TBC but rarely later, where i filliud 'folded'<sup>1</sup> seems to be used as its equivalent. Occasionally an adjective luascach 'flowing', is used of early cloaks, and Fr. Shaw would contrast this with the cloak i forcipul i.e. with the ends 'gathered up' about the wearer. The adjectives cóic-diabail, cethar-diabail would refer to more elaborate arrangements.

### The Brooch

Description of the cloak is almost always followed by description of the brooch. In the series of descriptions in TBC Tochim na mBuiden an occasional character wears it uasa dóit 'above his upper arm', but the place mentioned in ex. (1): ina brat uas a bruinne becomes virtually stereotyped at all periods, helped no doubt by the alliteration.<sup>2</sup> It is used with whatever type of cloak has been mentioned.<sup>3</sup> The scene of Arrest of Christ on the High Cross at Monasterboice (10th century) clearly shows Christ wearing a cloak fastened on his breast with a pennannular brooch.<sup>4</sup>

The words used in the examples: cassán (1), bretnas (2),

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1. TBC II ll. 3667, 3688; T. Étaíne (1) §22.

2. EAC §25, TTT L. 1149, TGD p. 263.

3. lend TBDD §125, fuan TBC I l. 3594.

4. McClintock p. 2, Illustr. no. (1).

mílech (4) are only some of the possibilities. Cassán is rather rare, and when it does appear the epithet gelairgit seems to be fixed.<sup>1</sup> Mílech only occurs early, but can be associated with many other references to animal designs<sup>2</sup> and the zoomorphic ornament familiar in surviving early Irish art. Bretnas is fairly common<sup>3</sup>, but the most frequent terms are éo and delg, which become regular in the later descriptions. There is no particular term meaning a pennannular brooch, unless it be roth, lit. 'wheel'<sup>4</sup>, while delg also means 'thorn'.

The brooches are usually said to be of precious metal: gold, silver, or findruine, sometimes with decoration of inlay<sup>5</sup> or gems<sup>6</sup>.

### The Shirt

Description of the léine is almost entirely fixed in early tales. It is white, or 'whitehooded' (gelchulpatach<sup>7</sup>) 'inset/embroidered with red' (co nderg-intliud<sup>8</sup>), and worn i custal<sup>9</sup>. Some of these elements survive in Early Modern Irish tales: léine gelchulpatach<sup>10</sup> co nderg-intliud<sup>11</sup>, arna derghudh do dergór re grian a cnis 'reddened

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1. TDL I § 4.
  2. TBC I l. 3206, MU II l. 724.
  3. EME § 14.
  4. TBC I TB ll. 3754, 3783; TBDD § 99 - from the king's chin to his navel.
  5. TBC I BMM l. 2356, FB § 49.
  6. CMT (ii) § 16, T. Troí I l. 32333, T. Beofhola p. 74.
  7. TBC I ll. 3598, 3823; TBDD § 132.
  8. TBC I ll. 3958, 3823, 3809; TBDD § 132.
  9. TBC I ll. 3958, 3809; MU II ll. 605, 748.
  10. BDC § 18, E. Chormaic § 25.
  11. E. Chormaic § 25.

with redgold next to the surface of her skin'<sup>1</sup>. Re grian a gelchnis is used of Conchobar's léine in Mesca Ulad<sup>2</sup> and itself becomes a fixed phrase<sup>3</sup>. The earlier phrase is also maintained in some tales: a ccustal a choeimh-chnis<sup>4</sup> <sup>and</sup> re gusmur a gheilchnis<sup>5</sup>. However the various corruptions show that the old formula was breaking down.

At all stages the material is described as silk or satin (exx. (1), (3)), sometimes 'gold threaded' órshnáith<sup>6</sup>. An alliterative pair of epithets with léine, síta / srebnáide / sróil 'silken / filmy / satin' becomes stereotyped in later tales.<sup>7</sup> Length is rarely mentioned, except in TBC which describes shirts to the knee<sup>8</sup>, or to the calves<sup>9</sup>. Only persons of some status wear the léine to the feet<sup>10</sup>, though this has been accepted as the norm for women. An alternative term for léine in some texts is caimise, borrowed from Latin camisia. This, like lend for cloak, is characteristic of the descriptions added by the interpolator in IU to the series of people in the hall described in TBDD<sup>11</sup>. The difference in terminology shows he was using a different source.

1. Acall. Fr. 4942.

2. II 1.526.

3. Acall. 1.369, CIL p. 48 (Dhá Sgéal Artúraíochta ed. M. mhac an tSaoí, Dublin 1967.).

4. TTT 1.1154.

5. TDL II §4.

6. CMT (11) §16, TBC II 1.1205, E. Chormaic §25, Forb. DD §20.

7. TBC II 1.4560; Imm. CM ch. 17; B. Suibne §8; TTT 1.1153.

8. TBC I TB 11.3607, 3618.

9. TBC I 1.14, II 1.168.

10. TBC I 1.18, TBDD §100h.

11. § 112-125.



The literary description of the léine does not agree very well with the picture gained from native and foreign illustrations, and foreign 16th century accounts. These all agree that the léine worn by Irishmen in their day was of linen (which appears in a few native descriptions<sup>1</sup>) regularly dyed yellow with saffron<sup>2</sup>. A yellow silken léine does appear in some late Middle Irish descriptions.<sup>3</sup> Embroidery is not mentioned in the 16th century accounts. However occasional tuarascála say there was a band of embroidery round the hem of the léine.<sup>4</sup> Sacred personages are generally depicted in native religious art as wearing a cloak over a long undergarment to the feet; and on the early 10th century High Crosses of Muiredach at Monasterboice and of the Scriptures at Clonmacnoise, and the early 12th century Breac Maedhóg (though not in the early 9th century Book of Kells, whatever its provenance) this undergarment clearly has a narrow band of decoration round the bottom.<sup>5</sup>

Sixteenth century illustrations of Irish people by foreign observers generally show the léine worn at mid-calf or knee-length.<sup>6</sup> However some of these illustrations make it clear that this is a longer garment being worn pouched over a belt, and this may be the meaning of

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1. TBDD §100h, MU II 1.603.
  2. McClintock pp. 75, 82, Frontispiece.
  3. TBC II FC 1.3730, TB 11.4382, 4471; Acall. 11.469, 3346, 3638 (men), 3892, 7659 (women) see also the Scottish Gaelic arming descriptions, Ch. VIII, pp 250, 256.
  4. TBDD §100h, LE DD 1.89 'from the knee to the ankle'.
  5. McClintock p. 2, Illustr. nos. (1), (2), (3).
  6. McClintock nos. 17, 18.

the obscure phrase i custal in the native tuarascbála. Characters are often further described as hitching up their clothes<sup>1</sup> to their buttocks (ós mellaibh a lárach) in preparation for a journey on foot. Wide hanging sleeves to the léine appear in these late illustrations and accounts, but not hoods.

### Weapons

As with the descriptions of dress, so K. H. Jackson accepts the weapons described as in general those of the Iron Age: 'one or two throwing javelins or a broadbladed thrusting spear, a long iron sword, often described as gold-hilted' and a round wooden shield with a decorated rim. The dvandva compound gaisced 'arms', from gae 'spear' and sciath 'shield', confirms that these were the basic weapons.<sup>2</sup> As with the articles of clothing, many of the details of construction and decoration which appear in the tuarascbála are now obscure. Weapons are also described in the later arming descriptions<sup>3</sup>, but I will deal with the earlier types here.

### The Shield

The shield is usually the first part of the warrior's weaponry to be described in the static tuarascbála. Quite often its colour or shape are mentioned: usually muted colours; white, grey and brown, black; and round, oblong, or curved (cruinn, fotal, crom/cuar). Decoration of 'arching animals' as in ex. (2) is fairly

1. léine FB § 20, Aisl. MC I 85.

2. 1964 pp. 15-17.

3. Ch. VIII q. v., pp 248-259.

common.<sup>1</sup> However the main interest in the descriptions is in the distinctive features of boss and rim, which may be described in separate sentences, and may also be used to stand for the shield itself. The native terms for 'boss' are cobrad and tul, as in examples (1) and (4), as well as bocoit, a borrowing from Latin bucca. The rim(bil) seems to have a cutting edge(faebur) as well as decoration: co faebur conduala 'with an engraved edge'.<sup>2</sup> The border(imel) (ex. (4)) seems to be the same part, which might be decorated or of different metal from the rest of the shield. Buaille (ex. (1)) is sometimes translated 'boss', but, if connected with the homonym meaning 'cowfold', probably means some sort of circular band, and maybe the rim, as seems possible here. Decoration of concentric circles seems to be implied by another term cóicroth lit. 'five wheels'.<sup>3</sup> Various other features, apparently ornamental, such as those described in ex. (4), are still obscure.

### The Spears

The warrior is generally described with a pair of spears, following the account of his shield. The regular words for a spear are sleg or gae, and the association of one of these with a smaller type(foga) is common. The use of epithets, or the adverbial phrase ina farrad, alliterating on f become conventional.<sup>4</sup> The main spear is generally said to be in the warrior's hand. Other types of

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§ 1. TBC I TB 11.3599, 3762; TBDD § 95, Imth Aen. 1.1924.

2. TBC I TB 11.3608, 3736.

§ 3. TBDD § 91.

4. TBC I TB 1.3635, Siaburcharpat CC IU 1.9270.



large spear are the sleg cóicrinne ex. (1), manais 'broad-bladed spear' and laigen 'lance' and of small spear, bunsach or craísech, javelins or darts. These can occur in almost any combination. The kenning caindel or tuire ríghaige, 'candle/ tower of a royal house', is often used for an impressive spear. (ex. (4)) Other accounts indicate that rivets might be used to fasten the shaft to the spearhead, and that the spears might be thrown with the aid of special cords, but in the descriptions these features seem to be more for decoration. In TBC II the description of Rochaid mac Faithemmain's spear continues<sup>1</sup>: co suanemnaib loga, co semmanaib findruine 'with heroic spear-cords, with rivets of white bronze'. Various words: toracht ex. (4), fethan, fonasc, seem to be used of metal bands round the shaft, apparently for decoration.

### The Sword

The most frequent conventional descriptions of the sword say that the hilts are gold (claideb órduirn, as in examples (2) and (4)), or made of bone or ivory (co n-imdurn / co n-eltaib dét.<sup>2</sup>) A kenning colg dét 'bone prickle' probably refers to this latter type.<sup>3</sup> Another type is called maeldorn 'bare fist'<sup>4</sup>, presumably indicating a different type of guard. In the descriptions swords are carried in many different

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1. TB 4429.

2. TBC I 1.3662; T. Ferbe II 1.4.

3. TBDD §76.

4. MU II 1.748.

ways: on the left side, on the thigh, on the belt, even on the character's back, as in ex. (2). Scabbards are occasionally mentioned.<sup>1</sup> The sword is the only one of these weapons to appear in the 16th century illustrations by foreign observers<sup>2</sup>, where it is not belted to the body but contained in a scabbard, which would have to be simply thrown aside when the sword was unsheathed for battle.

### The Chariot

The description of dress, hairstyle and weapons in the early tuarascbála is so circumstantial and detailed that it seems it must have been realistic at one time or another. I have shown that some elements were still valid in the twelfth century, and others in the sixteenth. Nevertheless, given the traditionalism of Irish society, and the basic simplicity of the costume described, there seems no reason why it should not go back to prehistoric times. However the best evidence for the archaic origin of these conventional descriptive passages is the description of the warrior's chariot, a piece of equipment that had gone out of use in historic times.

The section Tochim Ulad co Cruachain in Fled Bricrend contains three descriptions of horses, chariots and warriors: Loegaire Buadach, Conall Cernach, and Cú Chulainn; recounted by Findabair to her mother Medb. I quote the description of Conall Cernach and his chariot<sup>3</sup>:

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1. TBDD §95, 99; T. Ferbe II 1.36.

2. McClintock, Illustr. no. 18.

3. §47 as edited by G. Watkins, Celtica VI 231.

- (5) "Carpat fídgriind  
 dá ndroch finna  
 síthfe find  
 cret aurard  
 cuing druimnech  
 dá n-all dualcha  
 fer findchass  
 drech lethderg  
 fuamain find  
 brat gorm  
 sciath dond  
 bil chonduail  
 luchair derg  
 ara durn  
 anblúth n-én  
 úasa creit
- féthaigthe,  
 umaide,  
 forargit,  
 drésachtach,  
 dronuallach,  
 dronbudi.  
 foltlebor, (isin charput)  
 lethgabur, (laiss)  
 fuinechda,  
 crónchorcra,  
 telbude,  
 crédumai.  
 daigerdae  
 derglasaid,  
 n-éteгнаith  
 chróncharpait."

"A smoothed chariot of fine wood, two light-coloured copper wheels, a light-coloured pole overlaid with silver, a very high creaking frame, a ridged firm-curved yoke, two plaited firm yellow bridles. A fair-curved flowing-haired man in the chariot; he has a face half-red, half-white, a fair washed<sup>(?)</sup> skin, a dark-blue tawny purple cloak, a brown yellow-bossed shield, a bronze ornamented rim. A fiery red brightness blazes red on his fist. A charging along (?) of wild birds over his tawny chariot's frame."

Conall Cernach is immediately recognisable by his half-red, half white face. However the other two descriptions of the chariot<sup>1</sup> are very similar, as are chariot descriptions in other tales, all connected with Cú Chulainn<sup>2</sup>. The epithets vary to some extent, but the parts described are constant. It seems this tuarascbál was fixed in wording to an unusual extent, and its occurrence in different texts with minor variations in wording suggests oral transmission. D. Greene has analysed the technical terms used, to reconstruct a picture of the vehicle used in pre-Christian Ireland, taking the presence of alliteration between them as a guide to the earliest epithets used with each part.<sup>3</sup>

1. FB §§45, 49.

2. TBC I CFD 1.2955, TB 1.3847; T. Emere §14; Siaburcharpat LU 1.9260.

3. The chariot as described in Irish literature, in *The Iron Age in the Irish Sea Province*, CBA Research Report 9 (1972).



He provides a summary of the various versions.<sup>1</sup>

The word carpat itself is apparently identical with Welsh carfan 'framework', while the Gaulish equivalent was borrowed into Latin as carpentum, the name for a general-purpose vehicle. The Irish tales also show that the chariot was the regular means of transport in early times: riding on horseback, as in Táin Bó Fraích, ex. (4) may be a later feature but it was also characteristic of the side.<sup>2</sup>

Three of the four versions of the description which include this line describe the chariot as of wood, with the epithets given here; in the fourth fid- has become féth, a minor difference. There is evidence that the carpat was easily dismantled<sup>3</sup> and a formulaic description of its creaking appears in early tales announcing the approach of a chariot warrior.<sup>4</sup> The crett is described as 'creaking' in three of five versions; the others have alliterating epithets, including compounds of glinne 'firm'. However crett used here for the body of the chariot is a general word for 'framework' in Old Irish, confirming the impression that this was a light weight vehicle. Cuing is the usual word for 'yoke', and evidence elsewhere shows that it had two peaks, to fit the pair of chariot-horses.<sup>5</sup> The epithet druimnech 'ridged' appears in all five versions which describe the yoke, generally followed by a compound adjective containing dron 'firm'.

1. p. 73; all but TBC I CFD.

2. TB Fr. 1.26n.

3. D. Greene op.cit. p. 63.

4. Ch. IX, Land-travel, p. 282.

5. D. Greene op.cit. p. 69.

The terms used for the other parts of the chariot are much more specialized, and in several cases entirely restricted to the vocabulary of chariotry. In other contexts droch 'a wheel' has been replaced by roth; this has happened in one of the chariot descriptions, while another includes a line on each, either from conflation, or because the redactor no longer knew the meaning of droch. Despite references to metal in three versions, droch is cognate with tree/trough and probably denoted a wooden wheel. The epithets in another three versions are duba tairchisi 'black and ? ', and duba dorchaiddi 'black, dark' in TBC I CFD, omitting the obscure word and regularizing the alliteration. The references to metal could be transferred to another part of the wheel mentioned in one description; the fonnad 'wheelrim' or 'tyre'.<sup>1</sup> If the line fonnaid réidi rurthecha followed the pattern of a sentence per item, one would expect the dual rather than the plural here, but the words may be two further alliterating epithets for roth 'smooth-tyred, swiftly running'.<sup>2</sup>

Síthbe 'pole' is another word associated almost entirely with chariots, and rarely occurs outside the formulaic descriptions. In this case the majority of versions describe it with an adverbial phrase: co féthain findruine 'with a ring of white bronze'. D. Greene accepts this as original, since the pole joined chariot and yoke, where some sort of attachment would be needed. However such rings or bands are a common decoration to spear shafts in the descriptions. Three versions of the chariot-description include the line fertsí crúadi colgdírgi 'hard shafts straight as a sword'. The basic meaning of

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1. D. Greene op.cit. p. 64.

2. TBC I TB.

fertas is 'spindle', but it occurs in the literature both for the back shafts of the chariot, also called fert, and for the chariot pole in front, otherwise known as síthbe. The plural here must include all three shafts. Finally the bridles all preserve an old word replaced almost everywhere in Old Irish by srian, a borrowing of Latin frenum, possibly with the introduction of horse-riding. The alliterating epithets here appear in four out of five versions.

The archaic terminology of this early chariot-description argues that it is, as it implies, a genuine account of the Iron Age Gaelic war-chariot, of which D. Greene gives a reconstructed drawing in his article.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Style of the Early Descriptions

The occurrence of versions of the one description in several texts, and the archaism of its terminology, are two striking features, but another, which has no doubt aided its preservation, is that it is in verse. Different manuscript versions have added various extra-metrical words, but the basic composition consists, as Calvert Watkins has shown<sup>2</sup>, of heptasyllabic long-line roscað with a trisyllabic cadence, and regular alliteration across the caesura, though not between lines. The versions in Fled Bricrend, if one omits the description of the horses, also have a dúnad on the word carpat.

The question has arisen at various times whether all tuaruscbála were originally in verse. In her edition of a later prose

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1. op. cit. p. 65.

2. op. cit. Celtica VI 231.



chariot-description<sup>1</sup> C. O'Rahilly conjectured that 'all such descriptions of men, weapons, chariot and horses were originally memorized by the filid in verse form'. Certainly some of the early metric lines describing the chariot can be traced in many later examples, including this one. It also closes with the opening word, in this case incorporating the watchman device: at-chondarc 'I saw'. In one manuscript of Fled Bricrend the description of Loegaire is given the marginal abbreviation t., for tuarascbál<sup>2</sup>, while in another tale a prose chariot description is labelled R., for roscad.<sup>3</sup>

Stressed metre is used for several other descriptions in early Irish, almost entirely descriptions of people. The description of the heroine Deirdre quoted from Longes mac nUislenn<sup>4</sup> forms part of a stressed-metre prophecy. In the series of descriptions of people in the banqueting hall in Togail Bruidne Da Derga three are in stressed metre, those of Mac Cecht the champion, three Fomóire once captured by Mac Cecht, and the king, Conaire.<sup>5</sup> These seem to have been in one of the Old Irish versions conflated in the extant text, since in each case there is also a prose description. The description of Cu Chulainn's trícha cet in TBC II, which fills the place of the description of him in his chariot in TBC I, is also in long-line roscad.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Cathcharpat Serrda, Celtica XI 196.

2. P. Mac Cana, Celtica VII 71.

3. ACC I l. 13902, Cathcharpat p. 195.

4. Ch. V ex. (5), p. 119.

5. §§ 87, 93, 100.

6. TBC II TB ll. 4561-8n.

The content of prose and stressed-metre descriptions of people seem very closely related. The description of Conaire, like that of Deirdre, uses familiar colour-imagery for physical features: soerdath snechtaidi (skin) robuga (eyes) .. ndaelebrat (brows). This description, like that of Cú Chulainn's trícha cét in TBC II, follows the same order as the prose tuarascbála: physical features (cheeks, skin, eyes, brows, hair TBDD; hair, faces, eyes TBC II) then clothing (cloak, pin, léine TBDD; TBC II) then weapons (sword and scabbard, shield, spear TBDD; spear, shield, sword TBC II). The description of Mac Cécht<sup>1</sup> is mainly concerned with weapons: the warrior's shield with its rim and boss, the spear with its 'front iron' and double points, the huge sword. A few recurring expressions appear only within the roscad descriptions<sup>2</sup>, but others are found in the prose descriptions as well.<sup>3</sup>

The description of Cú Chulainn's trícha cét is made up, like that of the chariot, of short verbless sentences of a noun and two alliterating epithets, the second trisyllabic and providing the cadence. However the descriptions from Togail Bruidne Da Derga have much longer sentences, with the sense running on from line to line of the roscad. The account of each item in the description of Conaire

1. TBDD § 87.

2. Fuaman find fuinechda FB § 47 and TBDD § 100, sellglassaib Lg. § 3 and TBDD § 100.

3. Ingelt súili sochaidi lit. 'a grazing for the eyes of a multitude' TBDD 100 and Gen. Chormaic p. 254, TBC St. 1.4450; lénti síti srebnáide TBC II 1.4564, the earliest version: see léine above; gae gormruadh glacthoimsidi 'a dark-reddish spear fitted to the grasp' TBDD § 87 and T. Emere § 15, claideb órduirn intlaisse 'a gold-hilted inlaid sword' TBDD § 100 and TBC II TB 1.4308 etc., T. Ferbe II 1.35, MU II 1.536.

begins with at-chiu 'I see', which also provides a dúnad to the piece. This serves as a reminder that, through the use of the watchman device, all the roscad descriptions preserve the convention of being speech-poems. The examples given have also clearly been composed at some time for a particular tale, rather than inherited as floating formulae from prehistoric oral tradition: the description of Deirdre continues with prophecies of her future, that of Cú Chulainn's trícha cet with their grief for their wounded lord, and the descriptions from TBDD mention the Hall.<sup>1</sup>

However there is evidence that descriptions in metre were once more prevalent from within the prose tuarascbála, where lines consisting of a noun plus two alliterating epithets often appear among the other short descriptions of each item. In these the second epithet is regularly of the trisyllabic length required for long line roscad. The pattern is particularly common in describing the physical appearance of women:<sup>2</sup>

- (6) "Righti boga bláithghelai, méru seta sithgelui,  
ingni áilli iuchanda .... traighthi tana toinnghehu."

"Soft warm white forearms, long white graceful fingers,  
beautiful pale-red nails .... slender white-skinned feet."

Much of the tuarascbal of Rochaid mac Faithemain, quoted, (ex. <sup>p/4b</sup> (2)) could be reconstructed as verse (fol - chumdachtach, gai - fobartach), and in this case many of the lines recur: aiged fochaél forlethan, beóil derga thanaidi already mentioned; but

1. Bruidne Da Dergae taurchomruc §93; isin brudin brontig §100.

2. T. Étaíne (ii) II §4. Also: TBC II 1.185; EME §15; Aisl. MC I p. 97; EAC §5.



also dét niamda némonda, using the familiar image of 'pearls'.<sup>1</sup>

Another recurring line on the same pattern is dá braí dubai dorchaidi 'two black dark brows'.<sup>2</sup> The lines describing Rochaid's spears recur in TBC<sup>3</sup> and the second one in other tales<sup>4</sup>. The conventional epithets in later tales for the cloak, corcra corthorach or uaine oendatha, also fit into this pattern. Using these recurring lines it would be possible to construct a conventional description of a warrior all in verse - his skin, face, brows, lips and teeth, cloak and shirt, spear and sword.

It is the later prose descriptions which contain most lines of this pattern, but there is an obvious reason for this. In early times roscaid must have been distinguished from prose recitation by being sung in some way. Later when the regular type of verse was syllabic many passages in stressed metre became corrupted and confused with prose, as can be seen from the manuscript tradition. However some metric lines were preserved, whether because the rhythm was appreciated or because they gave an air of archaism. Lines of this pattern were also very easy to reproduce. A striking example is the description of Hell developed in Saints' Lives and native religious literature generally, where the demons include<sup>5</sup>:

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1. TBC II 1.189, EME §14, T. Étaíne (11) II §4, TBDD §75 Eg.

2. TBC I 1.30, T. Troí II 1.361, EAC §25.

3. I BMM 1.2362.

4. Siaburcharpat. IU 1.9270, T. Emere §15.

5. Betha Brénainn, Lismore Lives 1.3650. See also A. Keating 'The Three Shafts of Death' ed. O. Bergin (RIA 1931) 1.648 f., esp. 7.6600-6707 (cf. lfirinn).

- (7) "Dracuin derga demnachda  
 tigri tréna tangnacha  
 scoirpi gorma gimacha  
 seabhuic ruadha ro-arda  
 gribha garbha goib-ghéra  
 daela dubha dronn-mhóra .. "

"Red demoniac dragons, strong treacherous tigers,  
 dark-blue lobsterish scorpions, russet very-high  
 hawks, rough sharp-beaked griffins, black  
 humpbacked beetles .. "

In this case the description is clearly Middle Irish, since it depends on the generalizing of feminine plural adjective endings for the trisyllabic cadence.

I am not sure that all descriptions, even of warriors and their equipment, were originally in verse. There may well have been stylistic variation. The detail and length of the prose descriptions, especially the Tochim episodes, suggests that they were recounted as much to inform as to dazzle the audience with very long-winded eloquence. The narrative style of these passages consists of a pedestrian series of short, largely verbless sentences, little elaborated except where a few alliterative phrases have become established in the least changing parts of the description, or alliterating pairs of epithets used as in the roscaid tradition. On the other hand these have rhythm and alliteration as intrinsic features, and although the sentences may be of greater length, the repeated syntactical pattern of noun and epithets is good for creating a quick impressionistic picture. The convention that items are to be dealt with individually in a certain order seems common to both types.

#### Descriptions of Retainers

Most of the descriptions of people in tales are descriptions of warriors. Even when a warrior's retainers are described, they tend

to be shown in clothing to fit his station, thus the three harpers in the passage quoted from Táin Bó Fraích (ex. (4)) dressed 'in king's attire'. However in Togail Bruidne Da Derga, especially the long series of descriptions of people in the hall, the servants are described in quite different clothes from the aristocracy. A typical example is Da Derga's retinue<sup>1</sup>:

- (8) "Tosnánic Da Dergae iar sin trí coícait óclach ocus fotolberrad co clais a dá chúlaid forcach fer díb ocus gerrchocholl co mell a ndá lárach. Berdbróca brec-glassa impu. Trí coícait maglorg ndraigin co féthnib iaraind ina lamaib."

"Da Dergae came to them after that with a hundred and fifty warriors. And each one had a long (?) haircut to the hollow of the two sinews at the back of the head, and a short hood to their buttocks. They wore speckled grey short trews. A hundred and fifty blackthorn clubs with bands of iron in their hands."

Cochall, or its diminutive cochléne, a borrowing from Latin cucullus, seems to be the servants' regular upper garment<sup>2</sup>, although cloaks are also mentioned. Berdbróca/berrbróca are also worn by other servants.<sup>3</sup> The word bróg has been discussed by O. Bergin.<sup>4</sup> In modern Gaelic it means 'shoe', but it can hardly be dissociated from the Gaulish word for 'trews', brācae, mentioned by Diodorus Siculus.<sup>5</sup> In the description quoted from Táin Bó Fraích (ex. (4)) bróca seems to refer to leg-coverings; and the compounds berrbróc and fuathbróg seem to refer to garments, probably to be equated with the short trousers and loin-cloths worn by the soldiers arresting Christ, and

1. TBDD §60.

2. TBC I 11. 2969, 3259; T. Emere §16; TBDD §§ 113, 115, 126.

3. TBDD §§123, 126, 127, 135.

4. Eigse III (1942) 237-239.

5. V 30.



Cain and Abel, on Muiredach's cross at Monasterboice.<sup>1</sup> Gaelic men seem to have gone barefooted, as can still be seen in some 16th century illustrations.<sup>2</sup> From the evidence in native writings and sculpture McClintock postulates that there were two costumes in early Ireland, a 'Southern' costume of brat and léine worn by the upper classes, and a 'Northern' costume of jacket and trews, worn by the lower classes, or indigenous subject population.<sup>3</sup>

In some descriptions the upper garment worn by retainers is called not cochall but inar.<sup>4</sup> In equally early tales this garment is worn by people from the Otherworld: in Táin Bó Fraích the women who come from the mounds to fetch Fraech's body<sup>5</sup> wear a purple inar 'jacket', and green helmet (cennbarr); in Tochmarc Becfhola<sup>6</sup> an Otherworld warrior wears a 'jacket', 'helmet', and an enormous amount of jewellery: golden ornaments of some kind in his hair and gold and silver bracelets to his elbows. In other early tales women from the Otherworld are simply said to be wearing 'strange garments', and one wonders if this is the effect intended in these descriptions.<sup>7</sup> Jewellery is worn by warriors in the tuaruscála, including the neck ring (muntorc) also characteristic of the Gauls<sup>8</sup>, but a surprising amount

1. McClintock, illustr. nos. 1 and 4.

2. McClintock, Frontispiece and no. 18.

3. op. cit. p. 9.

4. Sc. Cano § 4; OMT (ii) § 93: the Dagdae in boorish guise.

5. § 20.

6. p. 176.

7. Imr. Brain § 1; T. Ferbe I 1.2.

8. Strabo IV iv 5, Diodorus V 27; TBC I 3245, E. Chormaic § 3.

is worn by the retainers in TEDD, including crystal arm-rings (failge), golden thumb-rings (ordnasc) and 'ear-ties' (aúchuimriuch), and silver necklets (muince) by the harpers.<sup>1</sup>

#### Descriptions of People, 12th century and later

I have already mentioned the yellow colour for the léine which replaces the earlier white in some 12th century tuarascbála, and is reflected by 16th century foreign observers. Another change of about the same date, and similarly reflected, is the elevation of the inar to a regular garment worn by the upper classes on top of the léine.<sup>2</sup> The illustrations collected by McClintock<sup>3</sup> show a considerable variety of decoration, from fringing to floral patterns. An elaborate inar given by a king is described in Buille Shuibhne<sup>4</sup>: purple, with a fringe or border (cimas) of gold and carbuncles, embroidered all over with silver 'in every place the point of a needle could reach' and fastened with silken loops and buttons (enaípe, a Norse loan). The faideran which appears in some descriptions<sup>5</sup> is apparently a kind of inar.

Developments in the language and contents of tuarascbála by the 15th century are no doubt best shown by an example, here the heroine of Tóraigheacht Taise Taoibhghile, who comes to Ireland in a boat at the beginning of the tale and puts Fionn under geasa to find her.<sup>6</sup>

1. § 119, LU.

2. Imr. CC § 54 (late MS); Acall. 11.1943, 3346, 5372.

3. Especially nos. 18 and frontispiece.

4. § 8.

5. Acall. 1.2438, Fr. MS 11.364, 955; Forb. DD § 20.

6. TTT 1.109.

- (9) "Ro éirigh ó'n gcurach iar sin inghean álainn il-dhealbhach fa caoimhe don cheathair-dhúil. Is amhlaidh imorra baol in inghean sin agus léne easnadhach or-shnáith a custula caoimh-chnis agus ionar snáth-chaol síor-éttrocht sireagha cona chnaipidhibh caoine comhdhlútha do'n ór áluinn ilbhuidhach fri hiadhach agus fri oslugadh ar uachtur na hórleineadh sin, agus brat donndearg dathálainn dealbhchomharthach cona eó cúanna ceardamhail caomh-óir isin bhrat ós a bán-bhruinne, dá asa exampla órrdhaidhe eidir a troighthibh tana toghaidhe ocus talmhain, calla briocht-rionnta buadh-chlochach ban-ríoghna ima ceann cona liagaibh buadh-lóghmhara bríogha isin mionn mór-éttrocht."

"After that there rose up from that ship a beautiful many-formed girl who was the fairest of created things. That girl was like this; with an embroidered shirt of gold thread next to her fair skin, and a fine-threaded ever-splendid silken jacket with fine evenly-spaced buttons of beautiful gold of many virtues to do up and undo over that golden shirt, and a red-brown beautifully-coloured emblem-bearing cloak with a fine well-wrought brooch of fair gold in the cloak over her white breast. Two rare golden shoes between her choice slender feet and the ground, a queen's veil preciouslly bejewelled with multiform engraving about her head, with its stones of costly virtue and power in the very-splendid diadem."

Shoes (assa, maelassa; usually described as made of metal) appear in descriptions of women in Old Irish.<sup>1</sup> In later tales they become a regular part of the dress for men as well, and the phrase eter a throig-thib ocus talmain becomes conventional, as here.<sup>2</sup> In early tales the most likely headdress for men or women is the diadem, mind,<sup>3</sup> worn in Acallam na Senórach 'as a sign of a king/queen'<sup>4</sup> apparently borrowing the significance of the foreign 'crown'. However in Early Modern Irish other headdresses for women appear: bréit 'kerchief', coirce 'coif',

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1. TBC I l. 32, T. Becfhola p. 174.

2. T. Ferbe II l. 123, BDC §18, E. Chormaic §25, C. Cumair §8.

3. FB §45, Sc. Cano §4.

4. ll. 4942, 5585.



but most frequently the caille 'veil', as here.<sup>1</sup> Although the description of it and its jewels is highly impressionistic, the caille must be associated with the 'linen wreathes' worn round their heads by Irish women according to 16th century foreign observers.<sup>2</sup> In some late tales the borrowed word sguir is used instead of léine.<sup>3</sup>

### Ugly Supernaturals

Many of the most radiant and detailed tuarascála in Early Irish are of people from the Otherworld, as in examples 1, 3, 4 above. However a more menacing side of the supernatural appears in the literature in the characters of ogres and hideous hags, also described in tuarascála. There is very little distinction between their dress and that of low-class humans, for example an ogre in Fled Bricrend:<sup>4</sup>

- (10) "Mael dub demsídi fair. Arít odor immi. Inar co foph a thóna im sodain. Senbrisca asalcha 'ma chossa. Mátán maglorci móri fria ais amal mol mulind."

"Black shorn hair on him. A dun mantle about him. A jacket to his buttocks. Dirty old ? round his legs. A ray of a great big club like a millshaft behind him."

However, as in descriptions of women, there is often great emphasis on physical appearance, always huge and grotesque, often dirty and smelly as well.<sup>5</sup> In early examples comparisons with the equative are made much use of. Almost all that remains of the TEC remscél Fochond Loingse Fergusa is the opening scene, where two hideous warriors arrive at Emain for a feast:

1. C. Cumair § 8: Fog. CC § 18: ECRI pp. 52, 168; TGD p. 168, DGP p. 309.

2. McClintock, pp. 74, 77, 83; Illustr. nos. 19, 25, 26.

3. TTT 1. 3938, p. 315 below n 3.

4. § 37.

5. Amairgen, Prúll, BCL p. 290, BEED p. 86, BCC p. 12 (LSS).

- (11) "Mael demis chirdub for cechtar de. Cia focherdtha dorn lán d' fhiadublaib fora cenna no giulaí fóra finn ara n-acairbi. Batir mesráini a ndí shúil. Batir cuirridir og. Batir duibidir cír. Batir méitithir coire colpthaige a nglúine. No sceirtfide saland méich di chechtar dena dá llurgan. Leithir leth ndamsheiche cechtar a ndá thraig. Ba mmóir choire ndarta cechtar a ndá odbrand. Brothrach co lluibnib finnaib im chechtar de. Ro iurtha mac secht mbliadan di cech mbrothairniu ro boí forai. Sciath for muin cechtar de. Ba lleithir domain dabcha... Dubidir domain coire cechtar a ndá ngnúsa. Batir gilidir snechta a fiacal. Batir méit fiacal cámaill. Batir móir claideb ngarmna a ndá claideb. Andar let ba mór mbliadna o bátar fo thalmain. [Inda llat ba mór mbliadna o bátar fo thalmain] Inda llat ba cúl scian srúb cechtar de. Dá liaigdelgg n-iairn ina mbrutt. Batir leithidir trí artemu. Batir finna na lluchrachra dia n-éis oc imthecht."

"Shorn jet-black hair on each of them. If a fistful of wild apples were thrown on their heads it would stick on their hair, they were so bristly. Their two eyes were measuring-vessels. They were as pointed as an egg. They were as black as jet. Their knees were as big as a cauldron for a yearling heifer. A sackful of salt could have been stripped off each of the two shins. Each of their two feet was as broad as half an oxhide. Each of their two ankles was as big as a cauldron for a heifer. Both of them wore a mantle with white tassels. A seven year old boy could be killed by every fibre on them. A shield on each one's back, as wide as the bottom of a vat... Each of their two faces was as black as the bottom of a cauldron. Their teeth were as white as snow. They were the size of camel's teeth. Their two swords were as big as a weaver's beam. You would think they had been under the earth for many years. You would think each one's nose was the back of a knife. Two iron brooches set with stones in their cloaks. They were as wide as three fistlengths. The rushes were white after them as they moved."

This concentration of imagery is characteristic of descriptions of ogres.<sup>1</sup> All sorts of homely comparisons are used, especially the different sizes of cooking pot, the favourite analogue for the ogre's swollen joints. Black skin, often contrasted with white teeth, appears in many later descriptions of ogres.<sup>2</sup> Another motif used of

1. TBDD §58; Prull; Forb. DD §77; TGG p. 12; ERL 1.3235; ELSR §3; ENC p. 141; BCL p. 290.

2. ECRI p. 66; Fog. CC §10; TGD p. 259.

both sexes is that the supernatural has only one hand, foot, and eye,<sup>1</sup> a posture also adopted by characters in early tales for the magical practice of corrquinecht.<sup>2</sup> The bristling hair which would impale fruit is one of a group of motifs recurring in descriptions of ugly supernaturals<sup>3</sup> (with a mouth so big the innards are visible<sup>4</sup> and calves and knees back to front<sup>5</sup>) which also appear in descriptions of warriors distorted by battle fury<sup>6</sup>. Although the watchman device is not used with this description, the audience is involved by the many appeals to their opinion (andar let) and the effect these creatures have on their surroundings — their weight crushes the rushes.

Some descriptions provide a detailed anatomical account using adjectival epithets only.<sup>7</sup> However there is no attempt to keep to the alliterating pair prescribed by the roscaid line. An Early Modern Irish example is the 'hag' or fury Erictho in Cath Cathardha<sup>8</sup>:

- (12) "Ba gránna in turcairthi atcomncas annsin, in amait  
aingidh Erictho Tesalta, edón caillech dhochraidh  
doidelba dícoll, os í cael corr cruaidrengach.

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1. TEHD §38; FTC Oss. p. 140; ENC p. 141; ECRI p. 102 (hag).

2. TEHD §61; CMT (11) §128.

3. TEHD §38 ogre; FDG L. 140; BCC p. 309; ELSR §108 hags.

4. A. Guill & Gairb §9; Fog. CC §63; ECRI p. 66.

5. T. Nnere §60; FDG L. 139; Forb. DD §78.

6. Ch. VIII, pp. 260-261.

7. Amairgen, EAD §4, EAG §19: ogres; EME §11, CML §87, Caithr. Thoir. p. 104 etc.: hags.

8. L. 4020, 12th century.



Aghaid glasbán etlaide inalcaille le, co cuirri  
gruaide, co tuille oile, co luimi lecon. Glennshúili  
locliatha linnaca ina cinn. Srón cuasach cícar  
croimremar, tulgorm tanaidhe, úrchrom úrgránna aice.  
Blaescbheól duvglass duaibhsech fíruathmar fodrecda le.  
Garbeccur gráinemail do bír-fhiaclaibh barrglassa  
bunodra i cechtár a dá drant. Mong liath roinnidi 'na  
scuaip aimréidh forscaíte imma cend. Láma lacremra  
litarrda aice. Cruib garbae glaiss-fethacha léo.  
Meóir cromma ceindremra for a garbglacaip. Ingne  
aithghera odurbhuidhi in seabaic fortha. Medón crapach  
cuislennach aici. Sliasta accaelae ibraide, agus dá  
glún garba glicurda. Dá coiss colpthae fiarcamma  
finnfadacha fotha. Dá lethan-sliasait delecha  
forméracha ica fulang. Gráinniu delbaib domuin a  
taidbred. Mesu isi fein inás a forcsi."

"Ugly was the outcast who was seen there, the wicked crone  
Ericto of Thessaly; to wit: an illformed misshapen  
emaciated (?) hag, and she skinny, spiky, hard-loined.  
She had a sad wan grey ghost-like face, with sharpness of  
cheek, with hollowness of jowls, with bareness of brows.  
Watery grey-pitted deepset eyes in her head. She had a  
cavernous greedy thick-curved nose; thin, blue-bossed;  
bent and hideous. She had a greyblack gloomy truly-  
horrible undershaped (?) scaly mouth. A rough repulsive  
row of pointed teeth, grey on top, dun at the root, in  
each of her two gums. A very-grey dischevelled mane in  
a rough scattered brush about her head. She had thick-  
hollow hairy arms, with rough grey-sinewed paws. Bent  
thick-ended fingers on her rough graspers, the very sharp  
dun-yellow claws of a hawk on them. She had a  
shrivelled veiny middle. Very thin yew-hard shanks and  
two rough rattling knees. Two bent-crooked hairy shins  
under them. Two broad uddered (?) long-toed paddles  
supporting her. Her appearance was the ugliest of the  
world's forms. She herself was worse than the sight of  
her."

The detailed bodily ugliness of ogres and hags represents an  
exact reversal of the physical perfection expected of idealized kings  
and their ladies in Early Irish literature. The ambiguous glamour or  
menace of the supernatural is sometimes expressed by contrasting two  
tuarascála; the Goddess of Sovranty who invites lovers as a hag, but  
becomes beautiful in the embrace of a fitting mate<sup>1</sup>; the glorious  
Spirit of Poetry who appears first as a hideous spectre<sup>2</sup>. Sometimes

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1. EME §§11-15.

2. Prúll.

both aspects appear in one description: the goddess Ériu changes her appearance from moment to moment<sup>1</sup>, a druid looks different to his friends and his enemies<sup>2</sup>. Descriptions of hags remained related to the supernatural hag as a belief, so that the 'banshee' who washes the clothes of those about to die is given a tuarascbál in Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh<sup>3</sup>, as are hags coming to abduct a child in a modern oral tale.<sup>4</sup> After the few early examples where the ugliness has mythological significance<sup>5</sup> ogres function merely as small-brained belligerent opponents for the hero, so that when they appear in modern oral tales the description has become almost entirely that of the international popular tale, with several heads, and making a great noise as they approach.<sup>6</sup>

Oral descriptions of hags, while sharing some of these features, also preserve some very old motifs: the deformity of being one-armed, one-legged, and one-eyed<sup>7</sup>; or the visible innards<sup>8</sup>:

- (13) "Ach cha b'fhada gus na dh'fháirich e crith air talamh agus fúaim air speuran aig cailleadh earradh roghlas ba ghráinne dreach agus dealbh agus aogasg a' tighinn, urchair dhe 'c'leth thoisgeil air a gualainn dheis agus urchair dhe 'c'leth dheis air a gualainn thoisgeil, agus an fhiacail a b'fhaide astoigh's i bu chreann rothaid an rothad dhith, agus an fhiacail a b'fhaide amach 'si bu bu bhrod griasaich dhith. Bha e 'smointean gur robh e 'faicean a cridhe's a gruthan air chrith air

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1. 'Tochomlad Mac Miled' ed. and tr. M. Dobbs, Et. Celt. II § 8.
  2. Forb. DD § 78.
  3. pp. 104, 140.
  4. Irish, GJ V 107a.
  5. Amairgen, Prúll.
  6. see Ch. IX, p. 281.
  7. Irish: LSÍC p. 45.
  8. Scottish: Sg. D. p. 39.

ùrlar a cléibh nuair a bha i sgamhadaich a' dìreadh  
an leothaid a nuas 'ga ionnsaigh agus sleagh theine  
air gach gualainn aice."

"But it was not long till he noticed the earth quaking  
and a noise in the sky from an armed (?) very grey hag,  
the ugliest of face and form and clothing, as she came,  
with the tip of her left breast on her right shoulder  
and the tip of her right breast on her left shoulder;  
and the tooth farthest in was her walking stick for  
the road and the tooth furthest out was her goad. He  
thought he could see her heart and her liver trembling  
on the floor of her chest, as she panted while climbing  
up the slope towards him, with a fiery spear on each  
shoulder."

The motif of enormous teeth is developed in some late  
manuscript descriptions<sup>1</sup> and is very popular in oral tradition. The  
long breasts are found in other Scottish tales.

Hags and ogres are the main descriptions of people in oral  
tradition, except where a description was an intrinsic part of a  
literary tale. Thus the hermit of DGP and the hero of ECCR appear in  
oral versions.<sup>2</sup> Women are occasionally described<sup>3</sup>, and one Scottish  
oral tale preserves the motif of the supernatural hag who becomes  
beautiful, with descriptions printed by the editor as verse<sup>4</sup>:

(14) "Chunnaic iad an ainmhir bu luraiche air do dhearc sùil riamh:  
Eha a sùil ghorm mheallach mar dhriuchd meala  
Ar bharr fàilein nan lios.  
Mar uchd eala no cloimhead canaich  
Eha snuadh lannair a cneis."

"They saw the loveliest maiden eye ever beheld. Her  
large blue eye was like the dew of honey." Like the  
breast of a swan or the down of bog-cotton was the  
radiant beauty of her skin."

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1. EGF p. 34, ELSR §108, hags; EAD §4, ELSR §86, ogres.

2. Irish: ZCP I §1, Scottish: Sg. D p. 17; Scottish only: WHT I 315,  
SS XIV p. 134.

3. Deirdire p. 24; LSIC p. 205 (FTC).

4. ZCP I 300, 308. \*'on the little garden sod'.



CHAPTER VIaThe Description of Cú Chulainn in his Chariot

- a) The Horses p.189.
- b) The Chariot p.195.
- c) The Warrior p.198.
- d) Chariot - Travel p.203.
- e) The Development of the Description p.206.

The Description of Cú Chulainn in his Chariot VIa

I have quoted the description of Conall Cernach<sup>1</sup> (ex. (5)) as an example of an archaic piece of a warrior's equipment - the war-chariot, and an archaic form: stressed metre. Loegaire Buadach and Cú Chulainn are described in the same fashion in this tale<sup>2</sup>, but in all other metric descriptions of the chariot the warrior concerned is Cú Chulainn<sup>3</sup>. A description of Cú Chulainn in his chariot was preserved in 19th century Scottish oral tradition, and its development can be traced back through the manuscript literature to this metric type - a period of over a thousand years. The description appears in many tales of which Cú Chulainn is the hero<sup>4</sup>, as well as independently<sup>5</sup>. For discussion it can be divided into its three main parts: the horses, the chariot, and the warrior.

The Horses

All the metric tuarascála preface the description of the chariot by a description of the horses - always two. However instead of the expected line consisting of dá ech plus two alliterating

1. FB §47, quoted pp 168-173 above.

2. FB §§45, 49.

3. TBC I l. 3847, Siaburcharpat LU l. 9251, T. Emere §§11-16.

4. ACC I, LL l. 13902, II §§ 32, 35; CFD Fr. §42, H<sub>2</sub>12 §42; TBC I BMM l. 2279, CFD l. 2944, II BMM l. 2295, CFD l. 2914, Stowe ll. 2334, 2843.

5. Cathcharpat Sereda; Scottish oral: LF p. 2: two almost identical long versions from the Grant (1814) and MacCallum (1816) Collections (MacCallum quoted here as having the better spelling); LF p. 3 from Skye, and TGS I XIII 288 from a man in Thurso, much worn down.

epithets<sup>1</sup> the form is always a long series of adjectives. Laegaire Buadach's two chariot-horses in Fled Briccend are described as a pair:<sup>2</sup>

- (15) "Da' ech bruthmara brecglassa comdatha comchrotha  
commathi combuada comluatha comléimnecha biruich  
ardchind agenmair allmair gablaich guipchuil  
dualaich tullethain forbreca fosenga forlethna  
forráncha cassmongaig casschairchig". (22 adjs.)

"Two horses of great passion, dapple grey, coloured alike, shaped alike, equally good of equal virtue, equally swift, equally bounding, prick-eared highheaded, great-spirited, great-bridled, striding narrow-muzzled, wavy broad of forehead, dappled above, slender below, broad above, impetuous, curly-maned, curly-tailed".

As in all the descriptions of horses many of the adjectives show the late spread of feminine plural endings to all genders. This may be a scribal innovation, but it means the first two epithets here could not provide a trisyllabic cadence in Old Irish.

However there is also an independent description of a herd of horses using an adjectival chain which appears in very similar form in two early tales:<sup>3</sup>

- (16) "Trí coecaib gabur ndubglas. Itt é cendbeca corrderga  
biruich baslethain bolgshróin brunnideirg béolaide  
saitside sogabaldaí crechfobdi fégi faebordae femendae  
cona tríb coectaib srian cruannaith friu".

"A hundred and fifty dark-grey horses, and they small-headed, red-pointed, prick-eared, broad-hooved with flaring nostrils, red-chested, well-fleshed, easily-stopped, easily-caught, swift to raid (?) eager, keen, vehement, with their hundred and fifty bridles of good red enamel on them".

The other version preserves the native word all for 'bridle', and the presence of a good many correct masculine plural endings in this and

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1. D. Greene op. cit. p. 63. To him the adjectival chain is the result of 'enormous conflation' by 'later redactors'.  
2. FB §45.  
3. T. Étaíne (iii) §3; TEDD §51 - which I quote.



the description of Loegaire's horses suggests that both must be Old Irish in origin. Later independent descriptions of horses still use the form of the adjectival chain<sup>1</sup> even in Scottish oral tradition<sup>2</sup>.

These are independently worded, but the descriptions of Loegaire's chariot-pair and the herd seem to be closely related to the descriptions of Cú Chulainn's chariot horses. In Siaburcharpat one seems simply to follow the other, so that this description, the longest in the context, runs to 36 epithets. Many of the descriptions seem to be closer to the herd-chain than to the chariot pair.<sup>3</sup> The group of alliterative epithets in com seems to be the most persistent part of the chariot-pair description.<sup>4</sup> Some of these (comdatha, comchrotha) would provide a good trisyllabic line ending. Comdatha however is avoided with Cú Chulainn's horses<sup>5</sup>, doubtless because of the tradition that one of Cú Chulainn's horses was grey, the other black.

In the descriptions of Conall Cernach and Cú Chulainn in Fled Bricrenn their horses are described individually. I quote from the description of Cú Chulainn:<sup>6</sup>

1. G. Cath 1.4733, 20 epithets; EMI p. 156, 25 epithets.

2. LF p. 210 Murchadh mac Briain arming run, 20 epithets.

3. Cendbeca cruindbeca corrbeca biruich bascind bruindideirg, TBC I 11.2287, 2451 CFD, EMM; cendbeca cruindbeca corrbeca ... bedgaich bolgshróin bolgroisc, ACC I; cendbeca cruindbeca baslethna ... bedgaig bolgshróin bruinnideirg, Cathcharpat, p.196.

4. Dá ech commóra comchrotha, T. Emere §12, dá ech commóra comalli, LU 1.9253 Siaburcharpat; the chariot hitched ar dá n-eachaib croda comarda, Cathcharpat 116; ar dá n-eachaib croda commóra, CFD Fr. §42.

5. Acht nammá co sain delba ocus datha 'but with a difference of form and colour', Siaburcharpat; cidat cuibdi comriata ... nídat comdatha 'though they are harmonious, trained together, they are not the same colour', ACC I, 11.13906.

6. FB §§ 49, 50.

- (17) "Ech liath lesslethan lond luath luamnach londmar  
 lugléimnech lebormongach maignech toirnech  
 trosmar tuagmong ardchend uchtlethan ..... (14 adjs.)  
 Araile ech cirdub cruaidchend cruind coelchos  
 cálethan cobluth díen dulmar dúalach druimlethan  
 dronchóchech maignech aigneach bairrnech  
 balccéimnech balcbéimnech lebormongach  
 casmongach scúaplebor grind." (20 adjs.)

"A grey horse, broad-haunched fierce swift flying very-  
 fierce heroically-leaping flowing-maned huge  
 thunderous very noisy with arching mane high-headed  
 broad-chested.  
 The other horse jet-black, with a hard head, rounded,  
 narrow-legged, with a broad ? , ? , eager, of  
 great motion, wavy broad-backed firm-curled huge (?)  
 spirited angry boldly-stepping boldly-stamping flowing-  
 maned curly-maned flowing-tailed neat."

The colour-adjectives make Cú Chulainn's Liath Macha and Dubh Sainglenn clearly recognizable, although they are not named in the identification.

Cú Chulainn's horses are also described separately in many later tuarascbála of him and his chariot.<sup>1</sup> All these versions seem to be related, and though the Scottish oral tuarascbála describe the horses (four in the longer versions) as a group, part of the description is clearly derived from a version which described the Grey and Black in turn. However within the form of the adjectival chain, and often preserving the same sequence of alliteration, the different versions vary considerably in length and wording.

The grey horse is described first, and liath 'grey' is usually the first epithet. Alliterating with it the element lug- ('small', or Lug, the hero-god) gradually gives way to luath, or lúth- ('vigour'), persisting to oral tradition.<sup>2</sup> The sequence maigneach tairrgeach is

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1. <sup>LL 1.13907</sup> ACC I, and II § 32; <sup>1.2289 1.2953</sup> TBC I BMM, CFD; <sup>1.2919</sup> II (LL and Stowe) CFD (not BMM); CFD H2 12 § 42, Cathcharpat & rda.
2. Lugaid luathléimnech ? swiftly-leaping, TBC I BMM, CFD; liath lesleathan lugléimnech leabormongach, TBC II CFD; lúthléimnech St.; lugliath léimnech, ACC I; lúthmar luathléimnech, ACC II § 32; luath liath lúthmar laigir léimnech, CFD H2 12 § 42, luath lutlugmar lugléimnech, Cathcharpat, p. 196.



also persistent in earlier versions.<sup>1</sup> A final pair of epithets in f (fótmar fochuirsiá 'throwing up great clods, ? ' ) appears in some manuscript versions.<sup>2</sup> Stuágnar 'greatly arching' appears in manuscript and oral tradition.<sup>3</sup> The wording of ACC I and CFD H<sub>2</sub> 12 is very close for the description of the Liath Macha (though not of the Dubh Sainglenn), though CFD H<sub>2</sub> 12 is the only version of the chariot description to put the black horse before the grey.

The description of the black horse in Fled Bricrend begins with the colour-adjective círdub followed by a group of adjectives alliterating on c. Casmongach is persistent and sometimes joins this group<sup>4</sup>, while other versions add cenand ('whiteheaded') which survives to oral tradition.<sup>5</sup> The colour adjective is more often contained in the group in d.<sup>6</sup> A group alliterating on s appears in several manuscript versions<sup>7</sup> and in oral tradition.

I quote the description of the grey and black horses from the longer Scottish oral version:<sup>8</sup>

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1. <sup>LL 1.13908</sup> ACC I; <sup>p.196</sup> Cathcharpat; CFD H<sub>2</sub> 12. §42.
  2. <sup>1.2290</sup> TBC I <sup>1.2954</sup> BMM, CFD; ACC I; CFD H<sub>2</sub> 12 §42; fótmar forránach ACC II §32.
  3. ACC I, CFD H<sub>2</sub> 12. §42.
  4. TBC I; Cathcharpat, CFD H<sub>2</sub> 12. §42.
  5. Círdub cenand, ACC I; cenand cael coscrund fata, Cathcharpat p.196; ceindfind crofind caelcosach, CFD H<sub>2</sub> 12. §42.
  6. Dub dualach dulbrass druim-lethan - the entire description, <sup>1.2920</sup> TBC II and Stowe; drondub dualach dualbras, Cathcharpat p.196; drondub dualach dulbras, ACC II §32; drondubdualach, CFD H<sub>2</sub> 12. §42.
  7. Seredchoel 'narrow heeled', TBC I; seng seta ('slender, graceful') seredchael, Cathcharpat p.196; seng sircael, CFD H<sub>2</sub> 12 §42; seng seghdha seiridchael, ACC II §32.
  8. LF p. 2, MacCallum 11.21-23, 29, 31-40.



- (18) "Cìod a chìmeas 'sa' charbad sin?  
 Chìmeas 'sa' charbad sin  
 Na h-eich liath lùthmhor stuaghmhor làidir ...  
 D'an goireas an Liathmhor mhaiseach."

(same introduction)

"Na h-eich chinn-fhionn chrodh-fhionn chaol-chasach  
 Ghrinn-ghruagach, stobhradach, cheannardach,  
 Sròl-bhreideach, chliabh-fharsuinn,  
 Bheag-aosda, bheag-ghaoisdneach, bheag-chluasach  
 Mhòr-chridheach, mhòr-chruthach, mhòr-chuinneanach,  
 Seanga, seadi is iad searachail,  
 Breagha, beadara, boilsgeanta, baath-leumnach  
 D'an goireadh iad an Dubh Seimhlinn." (21 adjs.)

"What do we see (?) in that chariot?  
 We see (?) in that chariot  
 The grey vigorous great-arching strong horses..  
 Which is called the great(?) splendid Liath."

"The white-headed white-footed narrow-legged horses  
 in fine coat, ? , high-headed; of little age, not  
 shaggy, small-eared; great-hearted, great-formed,  
 slender, graceful and narrow-heeled, beautiful,  
 playful, gleaming, wantonly-leaping, which they  
 would call the Dubh Seimhlinn."

The third, fifth and tenth lines quoted are clearly related to the manuscript descriptions, while the verb form in lines one and two preserves a literary ending obsolete in the modern Scottish Gaelic vernacular.<sup>1</sup> Presumably this description is derived from a manuscript. However the only manuscript version known which names the horses<sup>2</sup> is Siaburcharpat, where the horses are not even described individually. Doubtless a native audience would be able to identify them from their colours themselves, though strangely enough in TBC I the colour of neither horse appears in its description.

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1. Mar is used with various tenses and verbs in 18th century Ulster Manuscripts (N.J.A. Williams, Éigse XII 297-300) and in the Scottish Fèrnaig Manuscript, ed. Mac Parlain e.g. pp. 46, 84, 148. I am indebted for these references to Professor B. Ó Buachalla.

2. Apart from the gloss .1. in Liath, ACC II § 32. Siaburcharpat LU 1.9279.

The description of the horses individually is no doubt an expansion of description as a pair, maybe itself an expansion of an original metric line made to fit the roscað chariot description. However in many versions of the chariot description the horses are described both together and individually.<sup>1</sup> This was clearly the case with the original of the Scottish oral versions, which have the horses described as a group three times<sup>2</sup>, interpreted as a sort of coach-and-six in the Skye version, where the three groups are thought of as being at the front, in the middle and behind. This is a strange survival in Scottish oral tradition, since the latest versions we have extant in manuscript only describe the horses individually<sup>3</sup> or together<sup>4</sup>.

However, the unstable state of the run, adding elements, not only according to the rules of alliteration, but also by a repeated compounding element<sup>5</sup>, antithesis<sup>6</sup>, and loose rhyme<sup>7</sup>, and losing them again, suggests that it may always have been part of living oral tradition.

### The Chariot

The metric description of the chariot followed the description of the horses, the logical progression from the point of

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1. T. Emere; <sup>§§12-13</sup> TBC I <sup>11286 1.2450</sup> BMM, <sup>1.2417</sup> CFD; TBC II <sup>1.2417</sup> CFD; ACC I, LL 1.13904.

2. The second and third instances were quoted from Mac Callum above.

3. ACC II § 32, CFD H<sub>2</sub> 12. §42.

4. CFD Fr. §42.

5. ex. (15) 11.1, 5; ex. (17) 11.7 and 8; ex. (18), 11.8 and 9.

6. ex. (15) 1. 4; ex. (18) 11.8 and 9. pp. MO, 194.

7. ex. (17) 11.6-7. p. 192.

view of a 'watchman' describing the chariot's approach. In later descriptions of Cú Chulainn however a prose account of the chariot develops, which owes little to the earlier type, and describes the chariot first. It had no doubt by now become the distinguishing characteristic of a hero of ancient times. The description of the chariot becomes increasingly impressionistic and unrealistic, though in the earlier prose versions several different parts are still mentioned. Sometimes further items had been added to the roscad description: pupall corcorda, fortche uanide 'a purple awning, a green covering'<sup>1</sup>, popull uainidi, huaitne intnaise 'a green awning, an inlaid post'.<sup>2</sup> In TBC I CFD a prose description of the chariot precedes the horses and part of the roscad description follows. The version of this passage in TBC II is different in several respects and the roscad description does not appear.

A typical prose description of the chariot is that which begins Cathcharpat Serrda:<sup>3</sup>

- (19) "Atchondarc and carput féig foduinn féthamail findruine co llus, co lluas, co llángliccus, co pupaill uainicda, co fertsib findruini, co rrothaib finduma, co creitt uraird dírig drésachtaich dásachtaig caemchnessairt cholggfata cholggachain, co carput chraeslethan chraesluath ar da n-echaib ..."

"I saw there a swift strong smooth chariot of white bronze, (advancing) with vigour (leg, lúth) and speed and full skill, with a green awning, with shafts of white bronze, with wheels of fair copper, with a very high straight creaking frame, moving violently, of beautiful surface, long as a sword, of handsome covering; a roomy swift chariot drawn by two horses ..."

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1. Siaburcharpat, LU 1.9263.

2. TBC I TR 1.3850.

3. p.196.



A chain of adjectives describes the horses, but neither in this nor in other versions of the prose chariot-description do these epithets have the dative plural endings that would be required before the tenth century. The prose chariot-description is clearly a Middle Irish development. There is an echo of the metric type in the adjectives urard .. dresachtach applied to the creit, while the alliterating epithets in f- of the chariot itself may also be connected. Some other parts appear in TBC I CFD: co tuing 'with a yoke (?)', co tarbcláraib 'with bull-boards (sidepieces)', co lungetaib (obscure).<sup>1</sup>

It is this type of chariot-description which appears generally in later texts.<sup>2</sup> The alliterative phrase co llús co lluas co llángliccus appears in some other examples<sup>3</sup>, and seems to be reflected in the long Scottish oral version, where the carbad, decorated with findruine (fionnduinn) and with a jewelled seat (cathair), was made far am bu lúthmhor 's far am bu láidir / 's far am bu lánghlic am poball ùr 'where the youthful people are vigorous, strong, and fully clever'.

Some of the manuscript versions mention weapons for feats carried in the chariot<sup>4</sup>, and TBC II CFD says the chariot itself was armoured (cúicrind cetharrind 'five-spiked, four-spiked'.) This is also implied in the title Cathcharpat Searda 'The Sickled Battle-chariot',

1. See also Fergus' chariot, TBC I CFD l. 2707, CFD Fr. § 12.

2. TBC II CFD, <sup>l. 2914</sup> ACC I and <sup>ll. 7.13902</sup> II § 32, CFD Fr. § 42.

3. TBC II CFD, CFD Fr., ACC II § 32; LF p. 2.

4. ACC I; TBC I CFD and BMM, ll. 2947 & 2285.

though spikes are nowhere mentioned in that text. However in the episode Breslech Maige Muirthemne in TBC there is a development of a description of the chariot on that theme, where Cú Chulainn in battle-fury leaps into his vehicle:<sup>1</sup>

(20) " .. Is andsin do-reblaing ind err gaiscid ina chathcharpat serda, co n-erraib iarnaidib, cona faebraib tanaidib, cona baccánaib, ocus cona birchruadib, cona thairbirib niath, cona nglés aursloidi, cona thairngib gaíthe bítís ar fertsib ocus iallaib ocus fithisib ocus folommaib don charpat-sin. "

" .. Then the chariot-warrior leapt into his sickled chariot, with its iron sickles (cona sherrailb) with its thin sharp edges, with its hooks, and with its hard points, with its heroic spikes, with its arrangement for opening (aurisloicthi), with its (?) nails, which were on the shafts and thongs and loops and cords of that chariot. "

As with TBC I CFI, TBC I BMM shows a transitional stage in the chariot description, continuing Is amlaid boí in carpat-sin 'This is how that chariot was' with a version of the earlier prose account and a description of the horses.<sup>2</sup> This passage is omitted in TBC II, and ACC II § 35, which contains an expanded version of the 'sickled chariot' theme.

### The Warrior

As the most famous hero of the Ulster cycle Cú Chulainn is frequently described in tales, with or without his chariot. A table showing the various tuarascála and their contents is included at the end of this chapter.

In Fled Bricrend the three warriors described with their chariots have each a distinguishing feature. Conall Cernach has his one red, one white cheek. Loegaire Buadach has hair of three colours: brown next the head, blood-red in the middle, and hair which covers them

1. TBC I 1.2280, II 1.2296.

2. TBC I 1.2285.

as a 'golden diadem'.<sup>1</sup> Part of the description is in metre: ro lasat trí imrothu / imma chend cocairse 'They put forth three streams round his head of goodly arrangement.' Cú Chulainn's distinguishing feature<sup>2</sup> is: ocht ngemma deirg dracondai / for lár a dá imlisin, 'Eight red dragon-gems in the middle of his two irises (of the eye)', apparently a metaphor for multiple pupils. Many-pupilled eyes are attributed to other supernatural<sup>3</sup> or royal personages<sup>4</sup> in the tales, but are most regularly found in descriptions of Cú Chulainn. He usually has seven pupils<sup>5</sup>, and frequently seven fingers and seven toes as well<sup>6</sup>.

In Fled Bricrend Cú Chulainn is introduced as: Fer bróinech dub isin charput as áldem di feraib hÉrend 'A blackhaired melancholy man in the chariot who is the most beautiful of the men of Ireland.' Cú Chulainn is described as blackhaired in several early descriptions: fer bec brádub 'a small black-browed man'<sup>7</sup>; maeldub demis fair 'shorn black hair on him'<sup>8</sup>. In TBC I TB Cú Chulainn's black curly hair reaches his shoulders. However black was not the most admired hair

1. § 45.

2. § 51.

3. TBC I l. 38; TBDD § 49.

4. SG p. 90.

5. Three in one eye, four in the other T. Emere § 6, in each eye TBC I ll. 70, 3010.

6. T. Emere § 6.

7. MU II l. 539.

8. Siaburcharpat LU l. 9264.



colour in early Ireland, and the tenor of many early tales is that Cú Chulainn belied his heroic prowess by looking too small or too young.<sup>1</sup> His hideous distortions in battle fury gained him the nickname of 'sprite'<sup>2</sup> or 'squinter'<sup>3</sup>, explained elsewhere as being because two of the seven pupils were aslant.<sup>4</sup> Cú Chulainn's attractiveness to women is made much of however<sup>5</sup>, and later descriptions seem to be composed in order to give him an image of surpassing beauty.

Tricolour hair is regularly ascribed to Cú Chulainn in these later tuarascála. In fact, apart from Loegaire in Fled Bricrend and the doomed prince Lé Fri Flaith in Togail Bruidne Da Derga (who has hair of gold, purple and bright green)<sup>6</sup>, all other instances of the motif in the literature refer to Cú Chulainn. The wording used in descriptions associated with the chariot-run is clearly closely related to those in Fled Bricrend, as in Aided Con Culainn (I):<sup>7</sup>

- (21) "Fuil fer findcass foltlebor issin charpat-sin.  
Luinech derg daigerda 'na laim ar derglassad.  
Enblaith (.i. lon gaille) etarluamach uassa erra  
oencharpait. Folt dualach trí ndatha fair .i.  
folt dond ra tuind cind. Folt cróderg iar  
n-irmedón. Mind orda ra-tuigedar dianechtair.  
Cain cocarus in chind 7 in fhuilt-sin co(c)uirend  
téora imshrotha de immo cend."

"There is a man with flowing fair curly hair in that  
chariot. A fiery red lance blazing red in his hand.

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1. TBC I 11.1324, 1450.
  2. A shiriti, TBC I 1.1363.
  3. FB §§ 43, 98; see also Serglige § 5.
  4. TBC I 1.3010.
  5. T. Emere §§ 6-7; Serglige § 5.
  6. §105.
  7. LL 1.13911.

A hovering bird-flock (?) , (that is, the moon of valour), over the chariot-warrior of a single chariot. He has wavy hair of three colours, that is, brown hair next to the surface of the head, blood-red hair in the middle. A golden diadem covers it on the outside. Beautiful the arrangement of that head and hair, so that it puts three streams of it round his head."

The first three sentences can be found in the roscad description of Conall quoted<sup>1</sup>, and a further line, in the form Fil didiu imbisidi brat gorm cruanchorcra, appears in the description of Cú Chulainn in TBC I 1.2158. CFD. It does not contain the line about the birds, which the glossator here is trying to interpret as the motif of the beam of light that rises above a warrior's head in battle fury, but adds the motif of seven fingers and seven toes. The description of the tricolour hair is worded almost the same as in the description of Loegaire, but in the final sentence both show the 11th century verbal form cuirend, showing that this is a Middle Irish adaptation of the metrical line. Both continue with comparisons of the colour of the top hair, to gold thread and buttercups (?) <sup>2</sup>, or to polished gold, and the 'yellowness of a bee on which the sun shines on a summer day'<sup>3</sup>.

The description of Cú Chulainn in Cathcharpat Serrda,<sup>4</sup> beginning: Dofuill sin charputsín laech foltfhind foltlebor nirtchomsid cumachtaig, 'A fair haired flowing-haired strongly-powerful mighty warrior approaches in that chariot', is also closely related. It includes similar sentences about the lance and birdflock, cuts short the description of the hair after the three colours, but as well as the

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1. FE §47; ex. (5), p.169.

2. ACC I, LL 1.13918.

3. TBC I CFD 1.2963.

4. p.196.

motifs of seven pupils, seven fingers and seven toes includes a further elaboration: Cú Chulainn has seven dimples on each cheek, with seven rays from each of them.

In TBC BMM Cú Chulainn is not described with his sickled chariot, but afterwards, when the distortions of his battle fury have subsided, he comes to show his 'gentle beautiful appearance' to the women. Cú Chulainn is not described with his chariot in Comrac Fir Diad in TBC II, but there is another tuarascbál of him at the end of the Macgnímartha.<sup>1</sup> In both these tuarascbála Cú Chulainn has four brightly-coloured dimples on each cheek, of yellow, bright green, dark blue, and purple.<sup>2</sup> The BMM description contains all the multiple motifs so far mentioned: eyes, fingers and toes, hair and dimples. All but the hair appear in TBC II Macgnímartha. C. O'Rahilly<sup>3</sup> thinks this and the version in TBC III<sup>4</sup> are derived from TBC BMM, but a general traditional source seems more likely. A versification of the description of Cú Chulainn and his chariot in syllabic metre<sup>5</sup> includes the coloured dimples, sevenfold pupils, and tricolour hair (trí foilt ní h-inand a ndath). The latest prose description of Cú Chulainn and his chariot, in CFD H<sub>2</sub> 12,<sup>6</sup> begins as in Cathcharpat, further corrupting the lines about the blazing lance and birdflocks, but including the dimples

1. TBC II 1.1198.

2. TBC I BMM 1.2349, TBC II Macgním 1.1202.

3. TBC II 1.1199n.

4. ZCP VIII 538-9.

5. Serglige § 37.

6. § 42.



with the other motifs: cethri tibre fri (?) cectar a dá gruad .i. tibre buide ocus tibre gorm ocus tibre uaine ocus tibre derg 'four dimples on each cheek, that is, a yellow dimple and a dark blue dimple and a bright green dimple and a red dimple'.

The manuscript description of Cú Chulainn is clearly recognizable in the longer Scottish oral versions. These do not refer to the dimples, but all the other motifs are included:<sup>1</sup>

- (22) "Ciod a bhiodh 'na shuidhe 'sa' charbad sin?  
 Bhiodh 'na shuidhe 'sa' charbad sin  
 An laoch cumaiseach cumhachtach deagh-fhoclach  
 Liobhara, loinneara, deagh-mhaiseach.  
 Tha seachd seallaidh air a rosg  
 'S air leinn gur maith am fraodhar dha.  
 Tha sè meòir chnàmhach reamhar  
 Air gach làimh 'tha 'teachd o' ghualainn.  
 Tha seachd fuilteanna fionn air a cheann:  
 Folt donn ri tòinte a chinn,  
 'S folt sleamhuinn dearg air uachdar,  
 'S folt fionn-bhuidh air dhathan òir,  
 'S na faircill air a bharr 'ga chumail:  
 D'an ainm Cùchulain mac sèimh-Suailti  
 Mhic Aoidh, mhic Aigh, mhic Aoidh eile."

"Who would be sitting in that chariot? There would be sitting in that chariot the mighty, powerful, eloquent warrior, polished, shining, truly-splendid: There are seven 'sights' in his eye, and we think his vision is good. There are six bony thick fingers on each hand and arm from his shoulder. There are seven fair heads of hair on his head: brown hair next to the surface of his head, slippery red hair on top, and fair yellow hair the colour of gold, and the coverings on his head holding it: Whose name is Cùchulain son of genial Suailti, son of Aodh, son of Agh, son of another Aodh."

### Chariot-Travel

Various conventional descriptions of travel by land are discussed in Chapter IX and are dealt with here only as they affect the history and development of the description of Cú Chulainn and his

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1. 11. 41-55, LF p.2.

chariot. Two versions of this<sup>1</sup> are introduced by the conventional list of chariot noises illustrated by the example from Tochmarc Emere<sup>2</sup>. The description in Siaburcharpát Con Culainn is introduced by strange appearances, a great wind which has escaped from Hell as it opened to let Cú Chulainn out, mist which is the breath of the men and horses, and a raven flock which is the clods cast up by their hooves.<sup>3</sup>

Other references to travel are inserted at various points within the chariot descriptions. Some lines in ornamental language following the account of the Liath Macha in Fled Bricrend<sup>4</sup> include the phenomena which regularly constitute the 'strange appearances': clods 'blaze' under its hooves 'with fourfold strength' (co lúth cethardu), it overtakes bird flocks, and emits breath and sparks. (uiblech tened trichemruaid tatnit a croes glomarchind 'sparks of blazing red fire shine from its gaping muzzle end'.) Parts of this description appear, in varying degrees of corruption, in the same place in several later tuarascála of Cú Chulainn's chariot;<sup>5</sup> particularly the phrase which becomes fo lúth cethar crua 'with the vigour of four hooves', and the line about the sparks. Cathcharpat Senna introduces the theme of the strange appearances towards the end of the tuarascál:<sup>6</sup> Samalta lim ra trí airdi ind echrad sin: elta dubén os chind arbaige 4 ra cáer tentide 4 ra cith snechtaide 'I liken the characteristics of that horse-team to three things:

1. T. Emere §11, TBC II CFD 1.2850.

2. Ch. IX ex. (1), p.282.

3. IU 11.9240-50, pp.282-287 below.

4. §49.

5. Cathcharpat, ACC II §32, CFD H<sub>2</sub> 12. §42.

6. p.197.

a flock of black birds above a slaughter field, or a blazing mass of fire or a shower of snow'. It explains: Ba samalta lim fri sponcaiblig teined trichemruaid taitnes dar craes globarchind dóib, 'What shines over their gaping muzzle-ends seems to me like sparks of blazing red fire'; repeating the line used of the Liath Macha above. The black birds are clods thrown up, the snow is not explained. Comracc Fir Diad in H<sub>2</sub> 12 has a similar passage, describing only clods like black birds, and foam like falling snow: sneachta ... ig snaighi. <sup>[sic]</sup>

Some of the descriptions introduce conventional comparisons of the speed of the horses, to swallow, wind, and cliabach over the plain<sup>1</sup> or hawk from a cliff in a day of fierce wind, a spring wind on a March day over a coastal plain, and wild stag started by hounds<sup>2</sup>. These could have been added at any time, but their position in the description<sup>3</sup> argues some continuity of tradition. Also, a phrase from TBC I CFD: Is é triccius ocus attius imoroget 'That is the swiftness and jollity with which they drive around', appears in the later examples with the same comparisons: Is é sin gliccus agus trice agus tairpighi ocus trenluas cingit na h-eich 'That is the cleverness and swiftness and impetuosity and hardy speed with which the horses step forward'.<sup>4</sup> The long Scottish oral versions, after comparisons of speed to mountain mist, a hind, and a hare on the plain, end with lines which seem to

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1. <sup>7.2285</sup> TBC I BMM, Cathcharpat; <sup>p.196</sup> plus deer and marten (go lúas aindle nó feirthe no iarainde) ACC II § 32, CFD H<sub>2</sub> 12. §42.

2. TBC II and Stowe, CFD. II 1.2921,

3. Between the chariot and horses described individually / after the description of the horses.

4. ACC II § 32; Cathcharpat p. 196, CFD H<sub>2</sub> 12. §42. TBC I 1.2949.



reflect both this phrase and the 'strange appearance' of foam as snow:<sup>1</sup>

- (23) "Gum bu ceum tric, ceum luath, ceum muirneach  
Na h-eacha a' teachd chugain  
Mar shneachd ri snoighead nan sliosaihb  
Ospartaich agus unaghartaich  
Nan eachaibh 'gat ionmsuidh."

"It was a swift, speedy joyous step for (?) the  
horses coming towards us. Like snow was the  
panting and (?) of the horses approaching you."

I do not know what to make of the endings of each, unless they  
represent eachrad<sup>2</sup>, obsolete in Scotland.

The tuarascbál of Cú Chulainn in his chariot appears in  
Gaelic literature from Old Irish to 19th century oral tradition in  
Scotland. It is introduced into any relevant tale; as C. O'Rahilly  
says<sup>3</sup> 'it is as if the mere occurrence of the word carpat in a text  
triggers off one of these stereotyped passages'. However the form is  
constantly changing from the early to the modern instances, and though  
all the texts are obviously related, it is rarely that one written  
version can be said to be the basis for another.<sup>4</sup> In practice the run  
appears mainly in two tales: Táin Bó Cualnge, including its sometimes  
independent episode Comrac Fir Diad, and the death tale of Cú Chulainn.<sup>5</sup>  
Later versions of the tale do not simply modernize the tuarascbál found  
in the earlier version. The text of the tuarascbál seems to be  
developing independently.

1. 11.60-4, LF p.2.

2. See Cathcharpat, p.197.

3. Cathcharpat p. 194.

4. But ACC II § 35 is clearly based on TBC BMM; T. Emere §§ 77-76 is a  
compilation: see Ch. X p.321f.

5. ACC.

There is evidence for this in the independent existence of Cathcharpat Scirda, found in LL next to the list of tales a fili should know, and doubtless itself also part of learned equipment.<sup>1</sup> Cathcharpat Scirda is self-contained: it begins with the watchman device: Atchondarc 'I saw'; and also ends with it: lassin óclach atchonnacc 'with the warrior I saw', like the dúnad of a poem. It is of considerable length, describing the chariot, horses (together and individually) and their progress, warrior (looks, clothing, weapons) and charioteer, before the strange appearances of their approach. However, examples in tales can be just as long: in Siaburcharpat strange appearances, horses together, chariot, Cú Chulainn's appearance, clothing and weapons, and the charioteer; in TBC I CFD chariot, speed, horses together and individually, Cú Chulainn (mainly appearance) and charioteer. The beginning of the description in CFD H2 12 is now lost but it may well once have been equally full.

The importance of the tuarascbál of Cú Chulainn in native eyes is further illustrated by the subtitles in Táin Bó Cualnge: Tuarascbál charpait Con Culaind annso, in tres príimcharpat na scélaigheachta for Tánaich Bó Cualnge 'Here is the Description of Cú Chulainn's chariot, the third chief chariot of story telling on the cattle-raid of Cooley'.<sup>2</sup>; Tuarascbál Delba Con Culaind so 'Here is the Description of Cú Chulainn's form'.<sup>3</sup> TBC BMM is given the title:

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1. As with the written tales, it is not clear whether this text was intended to be memorized, or was simply a recording of a version of a piece memorized in oral tradition. LL 189a, see p. 26 above.
  2. TBC I l. 2941 CFD.
  3. TBC I BMM l. 2335.

In Carpat Searra ocus in Breslech Mór Maige Muirthemne inso 'Here is the Sickled Chariot and the Great Slaughter of the Plain of Muirthemne', in IU<sup>1</sup>; and the chariot appears as the colophon to the episode in TBC II: Carpat Searra conice sin 'The Sickled Chariot up to here'<sup>2</sup>. Siaburcharpat Con Culainn 'Cú Chulainn's Spectral Chariot' is the title of a tale, but a tale actually built around one of these descriptions.

The various tales in which it might occur in manuscript were known in Scotland<sup>3</sup>, but the oral versions, like Cathcharpat Searra, did not form part of a tale but seem to have been recited as independent pieces. One teller referred to both Carbad Alaire Chuchullin 'Cú Chulainn's Palfrey's Chariot' and Carbad Comhraig 'Battle-chariot' as pieces his father had known.<sup>4</sup> The four printed versions seem to go back to one original, but of the late manuscript texts to contain the tuarascbál only CFD H<sub>2</sub> 12 contains as much detail as the long Scottish versions<sup>5</sup>, and it seems too corrupt to be the source. The long oral versions, like Cathcharpat Searra, incorporate the watchman device here, in the form of repeated question and answer, as can be seen from examples already quoted.<sup>6</sup> The description begins:

(24) "Cia fath do thurais no do sgeul?  
Fath mo thurais is mo sgeul  
Feara(íbh) Eirim siod mar chimear  
Air teacht chugaibh as a' mhagh..."

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1. I. I. 2072.

2. TBC II 1. 2438.

3. TBC, CFD, ACC; see A. Bruford 1966 p. 256.

4. LF p. 3, Skye.

5. The chariot, horses together with comparisons of speed, grey horse, black horse, Cú Chulainn with multiple pupils, fingers, and colours of hair, chariot travel.

6. exx. (18), (22), pp. 194, 203 above.



"What is the cause of your (s.) journey, or your news?  
 The cause of my journey and my news ... the men of  
 Ireland yonder as we see, coming towards you (pl.)  
 from the plain."

The two words turas and sgéul may have been created at some time from the one word tuarascbál, while the reference to the Men of Ireland is reminiscent of TBC Tochim na mBuiden. The description may have come from a lost version of a tale, or been learnt independently in the way suggested by Cathcharpat Scrrda. The most satisfactory solution, from the prestige of the piece and its many variations in surviving manuscript tradition, seems to be to conclude that it was once much more widely known than now, and probably in both written and oral versions.

All the collectors of the Scottish oral description present it in regular lines like verse, without any explanation of how it was actually performed.<sup>1</sup> However various Scottish descriptions are treated in this way by editors<sup>2</sup>, and it seems to be merely a convention to show that the description is reduced to a regular rhythm. It is not likely to indicate that the description was originally in verse.

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1. Though the Skye informant associated it with Ossian's poetry, LF p. 3.

2. see Ch. VI ex. (14), p. 187.

<u>Descriptions of Cú Chulainn</u>	<u>Horses</u>		<u>Chariot</u>		<u>Warrior</u>				<u>Travel</u>	<u>Charioteer</u>
	Pair	One by One	rosca	prose	serrda	dark	coloured	1. hair		
FB Loegaire §45	X	-	X	-	-	-	X1		-	-
Conall §47	-	X	X	-	-	-	X3		X	-
Cú Chulainn §§49-51	-	X	X	-	-	-	X3		X	-
T.Emere §§11-16	X	X	X	-	-	-	-		X	X
Siaburcharpat LU 1.9251	X	-	X	-	-	X	-		-	-
TBC I TB 1.3847	X	-	X	-	-	X	X1,4		-	-
CFD 1.2941	X	X	X	X	X	-	-		X	-
BMM 1.2279	X	X	-	-	-	-	-		X	-
TBC II CFD 1.2914	X	X	-	X	-	-	-		X	-
BMM 1.2295	-	-	-	-	X	-	-		X	-
ACC I LL 1.13902	X	X	-	X	-	-	X1		-	-
II §32	-	X	-	X	-	-	-		X	-
II §35	-	-	-	-	X	-	-		X	-
Cathcharpat Serrda	X	X	-	X	-	-	X <sup>1,2</sup> <sub>3,4</sub>		X	X
CFD: Fr. §42	X	-	-	X	-	-	X <sup>1,2</sup> <sub>3,4</sub>		-	-
H212 §42-3	X	X	(	lost	-	-	X <sup>1,2</sup> <sub>3,4</sub>		X	-
Sc.Oral: Long LF p.2	X	X	(	lost	-	-	X <sup>1,2</sup> <sub>3,4</sub>		-	-
Skye LF p.3	X	-	(	lost	-	-	X <sup>1,2</sup> <sub>3,4</sub>		-	-
TGSI XIII 288	X	X	(	lost	-	-	X <sup>1,2</sup> <sub>3,4</sub>		-	-
T.Emere §6	-	-	-	-	-	-	X3,4		-	-
I 1.2341	-	-	-	-	-	-	X <sup>1,2</sup> <sub>3,4</sub>		-	-
TBC BMM II 1.2344	-	-	-	-	-	-	X <sup>1,2</sup> <sub>3,4</sub>		-	-
TBC II Macgníom. 1.1199	-	-	-	-	-	-	X <sup>1,2</sup> <sub>3,4</sub>		-	-
Serglige §37	(X)	-	-	(X)	-	-	X <sup>1,2</sup> <sub>3,4</sub>		X	-
TBC I 1.71, II 1.234	-	-	-	-	-	-	X3		-	-

CHAPTER VIIDescriptions of Everyday Life

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Descriptions of Everyday Life VII

(a) The Banqueting Hall

The descriptions of the hall which appear in various early tales give, like the early tuarascbála of people, a detailed and consistent account of its structure. The description of the hall is also referred to as a tuarascbáil<sup>1</sup>. A typical description is that found in Tochmarc Emere<sup>2</sup> of Conchobar's famous Red Branch Hall:

"Is amlaid iarom baí in tech sin .i. Craebnuad Conchobuir fo intamail Tighe Midchuarta .i. noí n-imdhadha a thenid co fraigidh ann, tricha traiged ina ardai cach airenaig crédumai baí isin tig. Eiscur de derg-ibur ann. Stiall ar chabur é iar n-íchtur agus tuige slindid iar n-uachtur. Imdhaidh Conchobuir i n-airenuach in tige co stiallaib airgit, co n-uatnaib crédumaib, co lígraid oir fora cendaib, co ngemaib carrmocaíl innib, comba comsolus lá agus adaig inti, cona stéill airgit uas in rí co h-ardliss in ríghige."

"That hall, i.e. the Red Branch of Conchobar, was in the likeness of the Hall of the Mead-Circuit, i.e. there were nine compartments from the fire to the wall in it, and every bronze 'front' in the house was thirty feet in height. A partition of red yew in it. A wainscot (?) below and a shingled roof above. Conchobar's compartment in the front of the house, with silver slats, with bronze pillars, with the lustre of gold on their tops, with gems of carbuncle in

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1. Late examples: T.B. Flidaise II (CR II 100); Altram TDM para. 3.
  2. §2, also FB paras. 2, 55; TBF para. 7, Ériu IV 30 para. 21: 'Scéla Conchobair' para. 2 ed. & translated W. Stokes from LL.

them, so that day and night were equally bright in it, with its silver slat above the king to the ridge-beam of the royal house."

Bricriu's hall as described in Fled Bricrend is compared to the Red Branch Hall, and also to the 'Mead-circuit Hall'. This legendary building at Tara<sup>is</sup> described and illustrated in a tract in LL and YBL<sup>1</sup>. This shows a rectangular building with a fire in the middle over which the cauldrons of food were cooked. These cauldrons are mentioned in some of the descriptions<sup>2</sup>, as well as the forlés or 'skylight' above the fire which let out the smoke<sup>3</sup>. The shingled roof appears in other descriptions, which make it clear the hall was made of wood<sup>4</sup>. The most characteristic feature is the imdai, or 'compartments' for eating and sleeping, arranged along the walls of the building, and apparently raised above the level of the floor in the centre. It is in these imdai that the noble subjects of the series of tuarascbála in Togail Bruidne Da Dergae are described, while the retainers are on the floor<sup>5</sup> as in the plan of Tech Midchuarta. The descriptions give each imdai an ornamental facade, aurainech, and the king's imdai is regularly described as richer and more prominent than the others<sup>6</sup>. The decoration of the pillars is elaborated in Scéla Conchobair to

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1. Suidiugud Tige Midchuarta LL Dipl. Ed. Vol. I 117.
  2. TBFr. para. 7; Ériu IV 30 para. 21; ScMMD para. 2.
  3. TBFr. para. 7, Suidiugud Tige Midchuarta l.3692.
  4. TBFr. para. 7 (pine), FB para. 55 (oak).
  5. for lár in tige paras. 109, 135, 138.
  6. TBFr. para. 7; TBDD para. 99; FB para. 55; Ériu IV 30 para. 21; T. B. Flidhaise II (CR II 100).

golden birds with gems for eyes. In later tales they make music<sup>1</sup>. The early decoration of stíall 'strip, panel, slat, border' (stíall ar chapur 'slat over a joist' is a fixed phrase) and flesc 'rod, lath' running from vat to ridgepole, or fronting to midbeam, is difficult to interpret and not used in later tales. However they seem to have been specific technical terms at one time. In Scéla Cano meic Gartnain<sup>2</sup> every house on Gartnán's island has a stíall ar chapur of red yew.

The description of the hall does develop to some extent. Several early examples mention windows: senistir, from Latin fenestra<sup>3</sup>. In Fled Bricrend<sup>4</sup> Bricriu constructs a grianán 'sun-room' with glass windows for himself and his wife above the hall. A hall in one of the Old Irish tales about Mongán also has a grianán and windows<sup>5</sup>, and grianán continues as the name for the women's room. In the Early Modern Irish tale Foghlum Con Culainn<sup>6</sup> Scáthach's hall is described as a grianán with windows (here the Norse loan fuinneóg), and seven imdhai between each pair of windows. E. Gwynn suspects literary influence on the description of the Tech Midchuarta, as in the prose text already referred to and in one of the dindsenchus poems on Tara<sup>7</sup>,

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1. T.B.Flidhaise II, Altram TDM para. 3.

2. para. 1.

3. TBFr. para. 7, sixteen with copper valves; FB para. 55, twelve with glass valves.

4. para. 3.

5. V. of Bran I 56.

6. para. 17.

7. Met. Dinds. I 70-74, poem IV.



from the descriptions of Solomon's house and temple in the Bible and apocrypha. However the particular features - measurements in cubits<sup>1</sup> and candelabra (cainnelbrai)-do not appear in the early native descriptions, which seem rather to have introduced imdai into translations of the Solomon material. Nevertheless the carbuncles which shine in the night must be an exotic borrowing, and the motif in Scéla Muicce Meic Da Thó whereby each<sup>2</sup> visitor gets only one thrust, successful or unsuccessful, with the flesh-fork into the cauldron, sounds less like Celtic hospitality than the practice of the Jewish temple described in the Book of Samuel<sup>3</sup>.

The only description in later tales to preserve any of the decoration of the earlier wooden halls is the account of Fionn's 'Speckled Ship' (Breacbharc) with alternate planks of 'red yew' and 'brown black oak' studded with carbuncles and other gemstones<sup>4</sup>. Later halls are all metal and marble (marmor) with a golden floor and carbuncle-studded walls 'making day and night equally bright' within a marble rampart<sup>5</sup>, twelve marble doorways with doors of gold, and pillars of glass, silver and bronze<sup>6</sup>. Most of the later descriptions of royal halls are set in the Otherworld, and in many a new wonder-motif is added: the roof is thatched with coloured feathers.<sup>7</sup>

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1. LL 11.3691-5.

2. para. 2.

3. I Samuel 2.14.

4. TTT 1.1045.

5. E.Thaidg p.351.

6. A.Fergusu meic Léide II p.249.

7. Acall. 11.787,806 (brown, red-purple, dark-blue and yellow); E. Chormaic para. 34 (white); A. Fergusu meic Léide II p.244 (white); EAC para. 18 (white and purple).

This motif is regular in Irish oral tradition when dwellings are described, but there seems to be only one occurrence of it in Scotland.<sup>1</sup> In Scottish tales dwellings, often also called grianán, as well as the hiding-place on the hunting hill used by Fionn and his men, are described more by situation than construction:

- (2) .."air chùl na gaoithe's ri aodann gréine, far am faiceadh iad a h-uile duine's nach faiceadh duine iad".

..!behind the wind and facing the sun, where they could see everyone and no one could see them".

This is also characteristic of the Otherworld<sup>2</sup>, but in oral tales may simply mean the place was well-concealed.<sup>3</sup>

(b) The Land

(i) In a Good King's Reign

Another conventional prose description which appears in Old Irish and later tales is closely connected with the ancient belief that the worth of a ruler affected the fertility of his land. The pre-Christian theory of ideal kingship celebrated in the king-tales is illustrated with various descriptions of the king's own physical beauty, of the hideous hag who becomes the beautiful goddess of Sovranty in his embrace, and finally of his land during his reign.

The examples in early tales are all associated with the most famous legendary kings: Conchubhar<sup>4</sup>, Cormac mac Airt,<sup>5</sup> Conn Céchtachach<sup>6</sup>, and Conaire mac Eterscéil<sup>7</sup>. The glowing description

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1. WHT I p.19.Ir.: Béal.VI.117, XXX.124. See p.303 below.

2. T. Étaíne(iii) para.10 v.6; Ch.VI ex. (1) p.145. See p.224 below.

3. MWHT I 346, 348; MWHT II 258, 260; W & S III 9 FTC, W & S IV 184 EIA.

4. T. Emeré para. 1.

5. Gen. Chormaic p.255.

6. Airne Fíngéin para. xv.

7. TBDD paras. 17, 66.

of the land under Conaire brings out the pathos of his early death: much of the description given below is later repeated to, and dismissed by, the man who kills him:<sup>1</sup>

(3) "Ro bátar trá deolatchaire móra ina fhlaith.i.

secht mbarca cach mís mithemon do gabáil oc Inbiur  
Colbtha cach bliadna, agus mes co glúine cach fhogmair,  
agus imbas for Buais agus Boind i medón in mís mithemon  
cach bliadna agus imbet chainchomraic cona rru bí neach in  
n-aile in nÉrinn fria fhlaith. Agus ba bindithir la cach  
n-aen guth aroile in nÉrinn fria fhlaith agus betis téta  
mennchrot. Ní luaiscead gaeth caircech mbó a medón earraich  
co meadón foghmair. Nírbó thoirneach ainbhtineach a  
fhlaith."

"There were, then, great bounties during his reign; that is:  
seven ships arriving at Inber Colbtha every June every year,  
and oak-mast knee-deep every autumn, and 'poetic knowledge'  
on the (rivers) Bush and Boyne in mid-June every year;  
and abundance of peace, so that no man killed another in  
Ireland during his reign. In Ireland during his reign  
everyone thought each other's voice as sweet as if it were  
the strings of the mendchrot. The wind did not disturb a  
cow's tail from the middle of spring to the middle of autumn.  
His reign was not thundery or stormy."

Imbas on the Bush and Boyne seems to refer to the bubbles of poetic  
inspiration which, according to native mythology, might float down  
the rivers from a source in the Otherworld.

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1. TBDD para. 17, repeated para. 66.



The belief in the influence of a king on his kingdom is also recorded in historical texts, sometimes with short descriptions.<sup>1</sup> In fact the Annals of the Four Masters seem to have borrowed this description from TBDD for Conaire's reign<sup>2</sup>.

The description of Ireland after Cormac mac Airt's accession, in the tale of his birth,<sup>3</sup> deals mainly with physical prosperity: the rivers so full of fish they cannot flow, the woods and plains difficult to traverse because the ground is covered with mast, or honey bestowed from heaven, because of the justice of his reign.

Most of the other descriptions of the fertile land in tales are used as the opening passage.<sup>4</sup> Tochmarc Emere begins: Baí rí amrae airegdae i nEmain Macha fecht n-aill 'There was once upon a time a wonderful excellent king in Emain Macha', and briefly describes Conchobhar's reign: Baí sídh ocus saíme ocus subaige. Baí mess ocus class ocus murthorad, 'There was peace and quiet and happiness. There was mast and earth-produce and sea-produce'. The first, alliterative, line appears in the opening of the translation tale Togail Troi<sup>5</sup> of Saturn's reign; and both appear in Echtra Chormaic<sup>6</sup>, which begins: Rí uasal oirdnide rogabastar flaithius ocus forlámus for Érinne fecht n-aill, 'a noble distinguished king once upon a time took the kingship and control of

1. LG LL 1.2341; AFM AD 15, AD 14 (a bad king).

2. AFM I 90, 'Age of the World' 5160.

3. Gen. Chormaic p.255.

4. para. 1.

5. I, LL 1.30824.

6. para. 1.

Ireland'. This inverted order, emphasizing the initial word Rí 'king', becomes increasingly common as the opening line of Middle Irish and later tales, even when no description of the king's land follows.

Airdrí uasal óirbítnech ro gab uas Éirinn 'A noble honoured high-king took charge over Ireland' begins another text in which the land in Cormac's reign is described: Tesmolad Corbmaic 'The Ardent Praise of Cormac'.<sup>1</sup> In this Cormac is compared to Solomon for his judgements, because of which calves are born after three months, yearlings are already milch cows, and cows' udders are full of beestings and vessels cannot hold their ceaseless output of milk. Each furrow gives a sackful of grain. The rivers are full of salmon, and honey is poured from heaven, as in Gen. Chormaic. Cormac is then compared to Octavius: Octafin Aughust, a poet called Senuath Éiges is quoted on his appearance, and the description ends by saying Ireland was made into Tír Tairngire, the 'Promised Land' of the Celtic Otherworld, in his reign. In the Book of Lismore version of Airne Fíngéin a description of Ireland in Cormac's grandfather's, Conn Cétchathach's, reign is added to the end of the tale<sup>2</sup>. In this the land only needed ploughing for six weeks in the spring, and the trees bore fruit three times a year. There were no weapons but goads, no insects but bees. Ireland is again compared to Tír Tairngire, and the cuckoos which sang from the horns of the cattle sound like Otherworld birds, such as those whose singing induced milk from the cows of Iuchna<sup>3</sup>. However it is also likened to Parrdus

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1. SG I 89-92.

2. para. 15.

3. ACR para. 1.

'Paradise', and the description in Tesmolad Cormaic is referred to: 'it is not known which reign was better, as Senfhuath Éices told in his tesmolad of each of them.'

Other descriptions praising a good king's reign introduce a further motif: the peace was such that a lone woman could traverse the country in safety.<sup>1</sup> This appears by itself in Cogadh Gaedheal re Gallaibh, of the reign of Brian Bóramha<sup>2</sup>. The earliest example of the motif seems to be from the English<sup>-man</sup> Bede<sup>3</sup>, who treated it as a proverb of his day.<sup>4</sup> It is probably a literary borrowing into these much later Irish texts, which may also have borrowed from each other. The Irish setting in both C. Cumair and CMM II includes the place names Tonn Chlíodhna and Beann Éadair. Cath Cumair goes on to synchronize the king it describes, Eochaid Feidlech, with Christ, Conaire Mór, and Augustus, and the description is called tesmolta in Cath Maige Rath II. All these tales inflate the style of the description considerably, with alliterative adjectives and parallel phrases.

The descriptions in the Romantic tales<sup>5</sup> are less concerned with learned parallels than a short decorative introduction to the tale:<sup>6</sup>

- (4) "Ard-rígh uasal oirdhearc feasach fír-ghlic fír-éolach  
calma curata ceartbhriathrach ro ghabh flaithios agus  
forlámhas agus forsmacht ar chríochaibh glan-áille cnuas-  
toracha na hIoruidhe, dar ba chomh-ainm Ioruidh mac

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1. C. Cumair paras. 1-2; CMM II p.385; CMR II 100-6.

2. Cog. p.136.

3. Hist. Eccles. II xvi.

4. R. Flower, The Irish Tradition, pp. 90-2.

5. TTT 1.1; ECRI p.50; EMI p.74.

6. ECRI p.50.



Dhealbha mhic Dhathaoín mhic Dhaire Dheirg-ghlais mhic

Ioruaidhe <sup>7c.</sup> Ba lachtmhar loilgidheacha, ba cnuas-thorrach coillte, ba h-iasg-líonmhar aibhne, ba trom-thorrach fearóinn, ba buidheanmhar brúgha, ba thoiceach oireachta, ba chonaigeach ard-chealla agus ba h-íosdaighthe ollamhuin le linn an tréin-Rígh sin."

"A high-king noble illustrious, wise truly-clever truly-knowledgeable, valiant warrior-like and of righteous words, took sovereignty, sway and power over the bright beautiful regions of Norway with their clustering fruits, whose name was Ioruaidh son of Dealbh son of Dathaon son of Daire Red-green son of Ioruaidh (and so on). Milkcows were full of milk, woods were cluster-fruited, rivers were full of fish, lands were heavily productive, halls were full of companies, assemblies were wealthy, great churches were rich, and poets were entertained (?) during the time of that mighty king."

The theme of the good king's beneficial effects on his land, with its descriptive possibilities, survives quite late in Bardic poetry.<sup>1</sup> However, by the time the description of the fertile land had established itself as a suitable opening passage in tales, the storytelling tradition was losing interest in native kings. Some of the tales which include the description are rewritings of older versions<sup>2</sup>, but in others the events are not even set in Ireland<sup>3</sup>. Despite a few recurring phrases, most

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1. Irish: 17th century, e.g. ITS XIII 176f., *Dáibhidh Ó Bruadair*; Scottish: late 18th century, e.g. Duncan Bàn Mac Intyre ed. MacLeod pp. 437-44.

2. CMR II, CMM II, C. Cumair.

3. ECRI, EMI.

of the extant descriptions seem to be literary workings-up of a common theme rather than an established descriptive passage.

The king's land is not described in oral tradition.

(ii) The Otherworld

Although early Gaelic literature is permeated with the notion of the Otherworld, which often provides the setting for tales, prose descriptions of it are not common. Probably the oldest is that appended to one version of the TBC remscél Gabál in tSída<sup>1</sup>. After the god Oengus wins Síd in Broga from the Dagdae, the text continues: 'Wonderful then is that land' (Amra dano a tír hisin). It contains three trees always in fruit, a live pig and a cooked pig, a vessel of special drink, and none of these things ever fail. Echtra Chormaic<sup>2</sup> which, though late, embodies much older themes, includes a description of a spring in the courtyard of an Otherworld dwelling. Nine everlasting purple hazels drop their nuts into the water where five salmon eat them, and send bubbles along the five streams, sweeter than any music, which flow from the spring. In the prose Dinnshenchus the mythological source of the Shannon is so described<sup>3</sup>, the source of poetic knowledge. These descriptions seem to keep to native ideas of the Otherworld, and are not marked stylistically.

However in many Old or Middle Irish tales, especially Echtraí, there are descriptions of the Otherworld in syllabic verse, usually put in the mouth of an Otherworld person trying to entice humans

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1. LL 1.32926.

2. para. 32.

3. RC XV 456.

to go there. The motifs gathered together in the poems are basically the same as those found in references to the Otherworld elsewhere:<sup>1</sup>

(5)a "Dabach and do mid medrach

oca dáil forin teglach:  
maraid béos, is buan in bás,  
conid bithlán do bithgrés."

"There is a vat there, of mead that causes merriment, being distributed to the household. It remains still - a lasting custom - so that it is everfull for ever and ever."

(5)b "Atát isin dorus sair

trí bile do chorcor-glain  
dia ngair in énlaithe buan bláith  
don macraid assin rígráith."

"In the entrance to the east there are three great trees of purple crystal, from which the everlasting gentle bird flock calls to the youths in the royal fort."

Things made of glass, and the singing birds, appear elsewhere in connection with the native Otherworld. The earliest examples of syllabic verse describing the Otherworld are no doubt the poems which are the most important feature of Imram Brain, the coíca rand rogab in ben o tírib ingnánath 'fifty verses the woman from the unknown lands sang', announced at the beginning of the tale. These contain a prophecy of the birth of Christ,<sup>2</sup> and the picture of the Otherworld is influenced by Christian ideas:<sup>3</sup>

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1. Serglige CC para. 33, ll.510, 494; debidé.

2. Imr. Brain paras. 26-8.

3. Imr. Brain para. 7.



(5)c "Fil and bile co mbláthaib

fors ngaiRET éoin do thráthaib;

is tre chocetal is gnáth

congaiRET uili cach tráth!"

"There is a tree there with blossoms on which the birds call to the hours. In harmony they call together every canonical hour".

This influence appears in the verse descriptions in other tales:<sup>1</sup>

(5)d "At-chiam cách for cach leath

ocus nícon aice nech;

teimel imorbuis Ádaim

dodon-archeil ar áraim."

"We see everyone on every side and no one sees us. It is the darkness of Adam's transgression that has prevented us from being counted."

The form of syllabic verse seems to have been first cultivated in the monasteries, and these verse descriptions seem to be a monastic addition to the tales, using a blend of pagan and Christian ideas.

A few Early Modern Irish tales contain prose descriptions of the Otherworld<sup>2</sup>. They preserve the earlier motifs of fruit trees and singing birds. An additional delight is the humming of bees, first described in the accounts of the islands visited in Imram Curaig Ua gCorra<sup>3</sup>. Despite the similarity of contents the wording of the descriptions does not seem to be related at all. They only appear within the genre of Otherworld voyage-tales, the Echtraí, and are not found in modern oral tradition.

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1. T. Étaíne (iii) para. 10 v.6.

2. EAC paras. 9,18 (a tuarascáil); E.Thaidg p.346 (prose and verse); ENC p.104.

3. paras. 60, 71.

(iii) Times and Seasons

Description of natural surroundings for their own sake appears in Old Irish lyric poetry, often attributed to Christian monks and hermits. Lyric poems describing nature, in various metres, are also a significant element in some tales, especially those of the Finn cycle, with its emphasis on a life out in the wilds.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes these seem to be older poems deliberately introduced to embellish the text.<sup>2</sup> Roscad addresses to a wild duck and a spring are added to the Egerton 1782 version of TBDD.<sup>3</sup>

Other roscad nature poems in early tales are concerned more mundanely with advising the suitable time of day or year for a particular action. In Aígeacht Aithirne<sup>4</sup> the host Amairgen utters four poems describing autumn, winter, spring and summer as his guest tries to leave, and only when summer has arrived will he let him travel. In Cath Ruis na Ríg the bad conditions for a military expedition in winter are described in roscad and in prose<sup>5</sup>. In Aided Guíll ocus Gairb<sup>6</sup> Laeg describes the evening in rosgad, beginning Dered dind ló 'The end of the day', to dissuade Cú Chulainn from travel.

In later tales morning and evening are sometimes described in prose. Some recurring phrases in the Romantic tales appear first in the Acallam: ro éirigh grian asa circaill teintighe 'the sun arose from its fiery orbit',<sup>7</sup> is dered do ló ann ór dochuadar

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1. Acall 1.329; B. Shuibhne paras. 40, 58; OCU CR I 108.

2. Macgníam.Fhinn para. 20, 'Uath Beinne Étair' 1.20.

3. para. 156.

4. paras. 1-4.

5. CRR I para. 6; CRR II para. 5, prose description only.

6. para. 36.

7. Acall 1.4644; TTT 1.4144, ECRI p.110.

neóil áilli aengela an láí as ocus táncatar damalta dorchá na h-aidchi chugainn<sup>1</sup> 'It is the end of the day ... since the beautiful all-white clouds of day have departed and the dark 'ox-herds' of night have come to us.' The coming of day often follows a feast, and the coming of night often ends a fight, in descriptions in manuscript tales. Another recurring phrase in manuscript describing the sunrise is: gur shoill\_sigh é cnuic agus céidi agus cabhain an talmhan ina timcheall 'so that it (the sun) lit up the hills and mounds and hollows of the land around them'<sup>2</sup>. The sunrise is rarely described in oral tradition.

There are however oral runs describing nightfall, often following a travelling run in Scotland<sup>3</sup> and a fighting run in Ireland<sup>4</sup>. Both areas preserve the recurring manuscript phrase: neóil dubha dorchá na h-oidhche 'tighinn, neóil síthe sèamh an latha ga fhàgail, 'The black dark clouds of night coming, the peaceful quiet clouds of day leaving him'.<sup>5</sup> In Scottish runs this is followed by the birds going to roost, while the traveller still must go on. Fionnladh Choinneachain<sup>6</sup> describes the terrain of a whole day's journey:

- (6) "Ma'm bu mhoch a dh'éirich grian ar glas-shléibhtean's air gorm-choilltean, bu mhoiche na sin a dh'éirich mac na bantraich agus dh'fhalbh e air a thurus. Bha e

1. Acall. 1.1619; TTT 1.4791; oral tradition - see below.

2. TTT 1.4148, ECRI p.86.

3. A. Bruford 1966 pp. 188, 193.

4. Béal I 310, VI 299, XXX 151.

5. Scottish, WHT II 312; see Irish example below, (7).

6. TGSI V (1875) 31.



a'siubhal frith agus fàsaich, machraichean mìne  
 gorma's garbhlaichean glasa shléibhtean, gus an robh  
 ciaradh air an adhar is neul glas air an speur, agus  
 eòin bheaga nam preas a'sireadh cothrom cadail fo  
 sgàth nan corra-chreag's fo dhubhar nan crann uaine".

"If it was early that the sun rose over green mountains  
 and dark-blue woods, it was earlier than that that the  
 widow's son rose and set out on his journey. He was  
 travelling heath and desert, smooth dark-blue  
 plains and grey rocky mountain places, until there was a  
 darkening in the air and a grey cloud in the sky, and  
 the little birds of the thickets seeking the opportunity to  
 sleep under the shelter of the pointed rocks and the shade  
 of the bright-green trees".

Irish oral evening runs are distinguished by the 'white horse'  
 which takes shelter under a dockleaf, explained to A. Bruford as  
 a 'small worm' or 'grub'.<sup>1</sup> The version which follows<sup>2</sup> also  
 preserves some manuscript comparisons in the description of travel<sup>3</sup>:

- (7) "Do ghaibh sé sin trís na gleannta mar a sceinnfeadh cat  
 idir dhá stáca ar thóir franncach, nó seabhac caol  
 uaithne trí scata mhion-éanlacha lá cruaidh earraigh  
 Márta, nó míol-mór tre bhró bioránach lá gairbhthín.  
 Leanadar 'sa rioth go raibh neóin bheag agus deireadh an

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1. 1966 p.194.

2. Béal IV 196.

3. Ch. IX ex (5), also Ch. VIII<sup>b</sup>ex. (7); pp. 287, 275.

lái ann, soillse solais an lái ag imtheacht uatha,  
deallradh dubh dorchá na h-oidhche ag tarraint orra,  
éanlacha na coille craobhaighe ag dul fri thortha chun  
suain agus síor-chodlata, an láir bhán ag dul ar scáth na  
cupóige agus an chupóg ag teicheadh uatha."

"He took off through the glens as a cat would spring between  
two stacks after a rat, or a slender bright-green hawk  
through a flock of little birds on a harsh spring day in  
March, or a whale through a jagged storm wave on a day of  
rough weather. He followed that course till little clouds  
and the end of day had come; the brightness of daylight  
leaving them, the dark black glow of night drawing in on  
them; the birds of the branchy wood going to find slumber  
and lasting sleep, the white mare going under the shelter  
of the dockleaf and the dockleaf fleeing from her."

#### Descriptions in Syllabic Verse

Descriptions of people, of dwellings and of natural surroundings  
seem to be the only descriptive passages in tales which  
occasionally appear in syllabic verse. The other conventional  
descriptive passages in manuscript tales, usually of activities  
such as hunting, fighting or travelling, seem to be restricted  
to prose.

Descriptions of people in syllabic verse include the  
heroes of tales<sup>1</sup> as well as other less important characters.  
Syllabic descriptions are also referred to as tuarascbál<sup>2</sup>, and

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1. Find, T. Ailbhe para. 5; Froech, T. Treblainne p.169; even Cú Chulainn in his chariot, Serglige CC para. 37.
  2. T. Ailbhe para. 5, Forb. DD para. 4, T. Treblainne p.169,  
A. Guill & Gairb para. 10, T.B. Flidhaise II CR II 220.

clearly versify the conventional wording established in the prose examples. Syllabic verse descriptions include the same items<sup>1</sup>:

- 8a "Claideb russi roindes crú  
coná imdurnd airgdidu,  
sciath co mbualid óir budi  
ocus co mbil findruini"

"A scarlet sword which blood reddens, with its silver hilt; a shield with a ring of yellow gold, and a rim of white bronze".<sup>2</sup>

- 8b "Dáine duba co nert niadh  
co léintibh gela ri grian."

"Blackhaired men with a hero's strength, with white shirts shining in the sun (?)";

and comparisons of size<sup>3</sup>:

- 8c "Oen súil ina chind, céim nglé,  
méit fri coire colpthaige"

"One eye in his head - a clear step - the size of a cauldron for a yearling calf";

and colour:<sup>4</sup>

- 8d "At-chonnac-sa féine Froech  
arnach faca loech budh mó;  
dergithir partaing a beóil  
gilithir éoin Locha Ló."

"I myself saw Froech, for I had not seen a taller warrior; his lips were as red as partaing, as white as the birds (swans?) of Loch Ló."

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1. Serglige CC para. 37.
  2. T.B.Flidhaise II, CR II 214.
  3. A. Guill and Gairb para. 10.
  4. T. Treblainne p.169.



Several incorporate the watchman device, as can be seen in the example above<sup>1</sup>. Several of the descriptions in syllabic verse begin quatrains with Fil<sup>2</sup>, the dependent form of the verb 'to be', but apparently an original imperative meaning 'behold'.<sup>3</sup> Fil also appears in the roscad chariot descriptions<sup>4</sup> and the Otherworld descriptions in syllabic verse.<sup>5</sup> Thurneysen says introductory Fil 'There is' occurs in 'archaic texts and poetry', but it seems possible to associate it particularly with descriptive passages designed to be visualized by the audience. Prose descriptions of people may have been versified in syllabic metres because there was already a tradition of the possible use of roscad rather than prose. Further, the consciousness of the watchman device, of descriptions regularly being uttered by a character in the tale, would mean there was no incongruity with the normal function of verse as speech poems in having descriptions in syllabic verse. There was no such tradition of the watchman device with the conventional prose descriptions of hunting, fighting, travelling etc., nor indeed with the description of the Hall.

Descriptions of people in syllabic verse seem to be verse renderings of established prose pieces, descriptions of the Otherworld in syllabic verse seem to be a new development in the

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1. Also T. Ailbhe para. 5: Ad-condarc laech; Forb.DD para. 4: Tarfas dam.
  2. Serglige CC para. 37: 2 of 8 verses; T.Ailbhe para. 5: 3 of 8 verses; T.B.Flidhaise II CR II 214:1st. verse.
  3. GOI para. 780. Or an impersonal transitive form 'it sees', C. Watkins Ériu XXI 94.
  4. Ch. VI ex. 5, p. 169.
  5. Imr. Brain paras. 4, 7 (quoted above), 25, 44; E. Laegaire 1.53.

monastic scriptoria based on earlier motifs rather than a well-known tuarascbál. Verse descriptions of halls seem to be influenced as much by verse descriptions of the Otherworld as by the earlier tuarascbála in prose.

Some of the descriptions are introduced as places the hero has visited - in Aided Fergus meic Léide<sup>1</sup> a poet, Aed Éiges, describes the dwelling and people he found on an echtra to the sídbrug 'Otherworld palace' of the leprechauns. Bricriu describes Oilill Finn's hall to the Connacht people on his return<sup>2</sup>. In Acallam na Sénorach<sup>3</sup> Cael brings Créide the poem she had requested, giving the tuarascbál of her great royal house and her precious vessels. All these descriptions are referred to as tuarascbál. However only that in Táin Bó Flidhaise uses any of the early terminology of halls, imdai, and pillars (uaithne) surmounted by birds, which in this text are singing. Créide's house has feather thatch and Otherworld birds singing:<sup>4</sup>

(8)e "Ro choiteltaís fir gona  
 cona taescaib tromfhola  
 re hénuib síde oc sianán  
 os bordaib a glain-gríanán."

"Wounded men with their heavy spurts of blood would sleep  
 with the Otherworld birds singing above the eaves of her  
 bright bower".

There is a vat in the hall full of malt liquor, and an apple tree in fruit above it, as in descriptions of the Otherworld.

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1. II p.249.

2. T.B.Flidhaise II 102.

3. 1.798.

4. v.14.

Bricrius' verse description of Oilill Finn's hall is also presented as a deliberate decorative composition, versifying a prose description immediately preceding. The use of verse to repeat the narrative immediately preceding seems to have instigated several of the verse descriptions<sup>1</sup>.

(c) Burial

All the other recurring descriptions in Gaelic tales are descriptions of actions. Unlike the static descriptions they are rarely referred to as tuarascbál<sup>2</sup>, and never seem to be turned into verse.

One activity described throughout the manuscript tradition is that of burying the dead. Táin Bó Cualnge<sup>3</sup> describes the funeral rites for Etarcomal, slain by Cú Chulainn:

(9) "Cladar a fhert iarom. Satir a lia. Scribthair a ainm n-ogaim. Agair a gubae."

"Then his grave was dug and his headstone set up.

His name is written in ogam and a keen

lamenting him performed."

and there are other early examples<sup>4</sup>. The 'name in ogam' which appears in most is represented in actual practice on the ogam stones found in Ireland and generally inscribed "(the stone) of so-and-so son of so-and-so". Some of the descriptions also include funeral games, as in Acallam na Senórach<sup>5</sup> and many later examples<sup>6</sup>, of which I quote that in Bás Cearbhaill agus Farbhlaidhe<sup>7</sup>:

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1. A. Guill & Gairb para. 10; T.B. Flidhaise II, CR II 102, 214, 216, 218, 220.

2. Only Fighting: Cog. p.180, Ch. VIII p.273 (TDG).

3. I 1.1385.

4. AAA para. 13, A. Blaf Briugad para. 12, Scél Baile p.22.

5. 2489, 3103, 3195.

6. ACC II para. 58; BC para. 26; ECRI pp. 96, 126; TGD p.272.

7. para. 61.



- (10) "Do feradh a cluiche caointeach agus do tógadh a lia os a lecht agus do sscríophadh a h-ainm occhuim, amhail ba gnáth";

"Her funeral games were held and her headstone was set up over her grave, and her name was written in ogam, as was customary."

The alliteration of lia and lecht, and the final phrase, are both fairly common in late examples of the description. It does not appear in oral tales.

(d) Feasting

Many of the descriptions of halls are connected with the preparations for a particular feast, and several examples give some account of the provisions laid in<sup>1</sup>. Other descriptions dwell on the precious dishes and cups in the hall<sup>2</sup> or pastimes, of fidchell and embroidery,<sup>3</sup> which are also described at feasts<sup>4</sup>.

Independent descriptions of feasting first appear in two Middle Irish tales in LL, Mesca Ulad and Cath Ruia na Ríg. Both describe the servants at work:<sup>5</sup>

- (11) "Ocus ra érgitar iar tain rannairi fri raind accu ocus dálemain fri dáil. Ocus ro dáiled in fhled-sain for mathib Lochlainne corbat mesca medarcaini. In n-usair ropo thréssiu flaith firu ocus ba comrad cacha déssi ocus cach thrír díb ra curit ina n-aitib ocus ina n-imdadaib ocus ina cotaltigib iat. Ro canait ciúil ocus airfiti ocus admolta doib. Ocus tarrassatar-som and co solustráth éirge arnabárach."

1. FB para. 4; Sc.MMD para. 5; V. of Bran p.56 (Tuait Baile Mongáin).

2. T. Ferbe II 1.401; Imth. Aen. 1.368.

3. T. B. Fraích para. 8; Altram TDM para. 3.

4. A. Fhinn II para. 4.

5. CRR I para. 13; MU II 1.194.

"And then carvers got up to carve for them and spencers to disperse. And that feast was served to the nobles of Lochlann till they were drunken and jolly. When ale became stronger than men and their conversation was between twos and threes they were put in their places and their compartments and their sleeping houses. Music and minstrelsy and eulogies were chanted to them. And they stayed there till the bright time of rising on the morrow."

Mesca Ulad includes dorsidi re doirseóracht 'doormen looking after the doorways'. The same phrases recur in other Middle Irish texts,<sup>1</sup> though they seem not to survive to later tradition.

The description in Mesca Ulad begins with the approach of the guests to the hall:

(12) "Is amlaid tancatar, each briugu cona bantuilg. Cach rí cona rígain. Cach fer ciúil cona chomadas. Cach ségaind cona banshégaind."

"This is how they came: each hospitaller with his consort. Each king with his queen. Each musician with his mate. Each chieftain with his lady."

A longer list of ranks appears in the description of the Feast of Tara in two Middle Irish tales<sup>2</sup>, which no one was permitted to attend without a spouse<sup>3</sup>. These tales deal in detail with where each rank sat in the hall, and what ration of food and drink each received - red meat for the warriors, veal and lamb for the young people and offal for the retainers. In a later description of

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1. Rannairi re rainn FB para. 14, Acall 1.798 (the verse description of Créd's hall), plus dalemain re dáil Lg.DD 1.12, plus dorsidi re doirseóracht Acall 1.4606.
  2. T. Ailbhe paras. 6-9; Suidiugud Tellaich Temra Ériu IV p.124.
  3. T. Étaíne (ii) para. 2.

feasting the nobles get white wine, the chieftains old mead, the hospitallers bragget and the rest beer.<sup>1</sup> The practice of sharing out the provisions according to rank appears in early didactic texts.<sup>2</sup> and in the 18th century Gaelic Scotland<sup>3</sup> as a genuine native practice. Feasting descriptions in later manuscript tales are still concerned with seating according to rank.<sup>4</sup>

(13) "Ocus do suided buird ocus binnseda na cathrach, ocus nír cuired ísel i n-inad in wasail ná uasal i n-inad in ísil, acht gach aon ina inad imchubaid do réir a uaisle ocus a athardha ocus a eladan ar na bordaib sin."

"And the tables and benches of the castle were set up, and the lowly man was not put in the place of the noble, nor the nobleman in the place of the lowly, but each one in his fitting place according to his nobility and his ancestry and his art at those tables."

However this interest is gradually superseded by the more general appeal of food, drink, and entertainment.

The provisions for the feast are briefly characterized in the Acallam<sup>5</sup> by the recurring phrase mua cachá bídh ocus sen cachá díghe "new of every food and old of every drink". This is widely used in later tales<sup>6</sup> and, in the form blas gach bídh agus

1. T.B.Flidhaise II, CR I 304.
2. Críth Gablach ed. D. Binchy, *Med. and Mod.* XI para. 46; Ianellach Tígi Ríoch ocus Ruirech 'The Full Complement of the House of King and Overking' ed. M. O'Daly, *Eriu* XIX 81-6.
3. CR I 304 n.
4. TGD p.268; also TDG (Oss) p.202; BBA SG p.336; Sg.R. 11. 26, 4425.
5. 11. 27, 2795, 5060.
6. T.B.Flidhaise II CR I 304, II 206; EMI p.164; ECCR p.276; Sg.R. 11.26, 1906, 3948, 6952.



sean gach dighe 'the taste of every food etc.'<sup>1</sup> appears in Irish oral tradition<sup>2</sup>. A similar description: rogha gacha bídhe agus togha gacha dighe 'the choice of every food and the pick of every drink' also appears in late manuscript tales<sup>3</sup> and oral tradition in Ireland<sup>4</sup>. The food and drink may also be described in manuscript tales with pairs of alliterating adjectives, already fairly stereotyped in the 15th century: a mbiadha saora sochaithmhe agus a ndeocha garga gabhála míne meisgeamhla 'their noble appetizing foods and their fierce alcoholic fine intoxicating drinks'.<sup>5</sup> This type of description appears in Scottish oral tradition.<sup>6</sup> Late in the manuscript tradition some provisions are distinguished by place-name adjectives: Spanish wine, Greek honey, and Scandinavian beer;<sup>7</sup> all of which are found orally in Ireland<sup>8</sup>. Another feature found in both Irish and Scottish oral runs, that may have come from a manuscript version, is the taste of honey on the food,<sup>9</sup> blas na meala ar ach aon ghrím agus gan aon ghrím tur 'the taste of honey on every mouthful and no mouthful dry'.<sup>10</sup>

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1. EGF p.44.
  2. Béal V 98, 296 (Cork), XVI 119 (Kerry).
  3. EGF p.44; Sg.R. 11. 537, 2992, 8015.
  4. Béal I 189-92 (Mayo).
  5. ECRI p.180; also OCU (CR I 120); TDG (Oss.) pp. 163, 202; EMM p.24; ELSR para. 14; ENC pp. 3, 141.
  6. WHT II 224, 5, 6; 447 - see below, p.239.
  7. Sg.R. 1.2992; EGF pp. 38, 44.
  8. Béal IV 94, V 296, 8, XV 142, 156, 182, 187.
  9. Scottish: TGSI XIII 70.
  10. Irish: Béal XXX 134 Seán Ó Bhriain; I 189f, II 297, IV 94, VI 121, 300.

The pleasures of intoxication, and of music, are taken for granted throughout the tradition:<sup>1</sup>

- (14) "Nuair a bheidh meisge ortha do dhuim dighe, do chur dhíobhtha le sinim théuda, agus an uair a bheidh meisge dhíobhtha, do chur ortha le deocha garga gabháltach".
- "When they were drunk with drink they put it from them with the playing of strings, and when drunkenness was away they put it back with fierce intoxicating drinks."

Music, praise-poems, genealogy and tales are regularly described in manuscript tales:<sup>2</sup>

- (15) "Ro éirghe an aes chiúil, oirfidedh acas eladhna do sheinn na cruitedha ceólbhinne caeintéadacha, acas a ttiompána taithnemhacha táidhúire; acas do ghabháil a ndrechta ffilidheachta, a ccræbha coimhnesa acas a ngéga géinelaidh".
- "The people of music, minstrelsy and art rose up to play the harmonious fairstringed harps, and their pleasing plaintive timpáns, and to recite their poetic compositions, their family trees and branches of genealogy."

The same elements are prominent in Scottish oral feasting runs<sup>3</sup>:

- (16) "Fìon an àite òil, ceòl an àite éisdeachd, céir an àite a losgaidh, biadh an àite a chosgaidh".
- "Wine in the place for drinking, music in the place for listening, wax in the place for burning, food in the place for eating."

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1. Sg.R. 1.4425.

2. CRR I para. 13; OCU CR I 12, GJ I 394 quoted; BBA LSS p.19; ECRI p.140; ENC p.3.

3. TGS I XIII 70, also WHT II 140, 167, 441 (Alexander Mac Neill); Sg.D p.41.

<sup>1</sup>fuaime clàrsaich shìos is séisd fìdhle shuas 'the sound of the harp below and a fiddle tune above'; le Caithream bhard's le fuaime dàn 'with the declamation of poets and the sound of lays'.

### Music

Several Old Irish tales describe the wonderful effects of music played by people from the Otherworld<sup>2</sup>. The music is divided into three types: gentraiges 'smiling strain' which makes all its hearers laugh, goltraiges 'weeping strain' which makes them all cry, and suantraiges 'sleeping strain', which lulls all its hearers to sleep. Magic sleep-inducing music becomes common as plot motif, lulling the enemy so that captives can escape<sup>3</sup> or lovers meet<sup>4</sup>.

In later tales the idea of music so sweet it could lull even people in pain to sleep is also used as a descriptive hypothesis. The wording seems to be fixed as early as the Acallam<sup>5</sup>. Such music often still has an Otherworld origin, like that played by a piper from Síd ar Femen:<sup>6</sup>

(17) "Ocus do sinn ... cuir ocus puirt ocus adhbhuinn duinn, innus co coiteólad aes gonta no mná re lámnad no fiallach galrach no curaid crechnaide no laeích leónta frisin ceól soinemail do-rinne".

"And he played strains and tunes and melodies for us, so that wounded people or women in childbirth or sick warriors or wounded champions or injured heroes would sleep at the exquisite music he made."

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1. TGS I V (1875) 29, 37.

2. TBFr. para. 10; CMT (ii) paras. 73, 163-4; CMM I para. 8.

3. CMT (ii) para. 164.

4. Org.DR 1.368.

5. 11.432,854 - quoted from the verse description of Créide's house, 4620, 5553.

6. A. Fhinn II para. 7; also Caithr. Congh pp. 111,134 (Otherworld birds); TTT 1.6782; EMI p.134.



A longer description recurs in Eachtra an Cheithearnaigh Chaoilriabhaigh as one of the particular accomplishments of the mysterious Ceatharnach<sup>1</sup>. This tale has survived to oral tradition only in Scotland, with a music run which appears in other Scottish oral tales<sup>2</sup>.

A description of the effects of music is also incorporated into many oral Scottish feasting runs:<sup>3</sup>

- (18) "Thogadh an ceòl's leagadh am bròn. Bha deochanna mìne misgeach's deochanna garbha gan gabhail: ceòl ann an teudan fiodhlach a' sìor-léigheas gach galair, a chuireadh fir ghointe agus mnathan siubhla nan cadal air a mhòr-bhaile an oidhche sin."

"Music was raised and sorrow laid down. Fine intoxicating drinks and rough drinks were taken, music in fiddle-strings ever healing every sickness, which would put wounded men and women giving birth to sleep in the great town that night.

Many descriptions in manuscript and oral tradition give the duration of the feast; often three days and nights in manuscript tales,<sup>4</sup> seven days and nights in oral tradition. The festivities are regularly brought to an end by weariness and sleep, as in ex.

- (11). In late manuscript tales the motif of dividing the night into thirds, for food and entertainment, followed by sleep, appears.<sup>5</sup> The example quoted from Tóraighecht in Ghilla Dheacair (ex. 13)<sup>p. 235</sup> continues the description till sunrise in the morning:

1. SG pp. 277, 278, 280, 288.
2. ECCR: WHT I 302, 303 Scottish Studies XIV 137; (EIA) Rosg Gàidhlig p.77; see A. Bruford 1966 p.203, SS XIV 152 n 16.
3. TGS I XIII 70; almost identically in WHT II 461 (EIA) and WHT II 210, 211 (DGP), which I quote.
4. FB para. 55, Acall 1.2795; TGD p.268.
5. EGF p.38; Sg.R 11.26, 537, 2992, 4052, 7139, 7492.

- (19) "Tucad biada saora sochaithme chuca ocus deocha blasta brígmara. Ocus tucatar in chétshel don oidche re h-ól, in dara sel re ceól ocus re h-aolbnes ocus urghairdiugad menman ocus aicenta. Tucatar in tres shel re suan ocus re sírchotlad do denam, no gur éirig in ghrian ina circhaill teintide os cionn na talman tromfodaige arna mharach".

"Noble appetizing foods were brought them and tasty powerful drinks. And they gave up the first part of the night to drinking, the second part to music and joy and cheering of mind and spirit. They gave the third part to slumber and longsleeping, until the sun rose like a fiery circle over the heavy-sodded earth on the morrow".

A triadic division of time occurs much earlier, when Conchobar spends his day watching the boys' games, playing fidchell, and eating and drinking till he is sleepy.<sup>1</sup> The motif is very popular in Irish oral feasting runs, which may include storytelling<sup>2</sup>, and dancing (rinnce)<sup>3</sup>. In Connemara and Mayo the storyteller's own art often predominates.<sup>4</sup> The 'thirds of the night' do not appear in Scotland.

- (20) "Chaitheadar an oidhche sin 'na trí treana, trian le fiannaigheacht, trian le sgeúlaigheacht, trian le caitheamh bídh agus dighe agus le síor-chodalta".

"They spent that night in three thirds, a third for Finn-  
tales, a third for storytelling, a third for consuming food  
and drink and for long-sleeping".

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1. TBC I 402 II 744.

2. also EGF p.38.

3. Béal XVI 119.

4. Béal IV 194; also I 47, 189 f, 332, IV 324f, VI 300; extended to four thirds to fit everything in Béal XV 146 f.

Several Early Modern Irish tales begin with the description of a feast<sup>1</sup>, often with the opening sentence inverted for emphasis: Fleadh mhór-chaoín mhór-adhbhal do commóradh le Fionn mac Cumhaill, 'A great fine enormous feast was celebrated by Fionn mac Cumhaill'.<sup>2</sup>

Oral versions of manuscript tales, as well as international tales told in Scotland and Ireland, frequently end with a description of a feast, very often for a wedding.<sup>3</sup> The run which appears is like that used in the body of a tale, but there is sometimes a more homely emphasis on the abundance of food and drink, found widely in instructional popular tales.<sup>4</sup> Turkeys, geese and bullocks are killed for the wedding feast which ends an Arran tale<sup>5</sup>. Drink overflows in a Scottish run, told by a tinker in 1859<sup>6</sup>.

(21) "... Rinn iad banais mhór ghreadhnach a mhair seachd Lathan's seachd bhliadhna's cha chluinneadh tu ach lig lig's big big, fuaime tail's tarruing pinne, 'or 'ga phronnadh bho bhonn na coise gu barr am meòir fad sheachd bliadha's seachd lathan."

"...They made a great joyful wedding that lasted seven days and seven years, and you would have heard nothing but lig lig and big big, the noise of the adze and the drawing of spigots; gold being bestowed from the sole of the foot to the fingertips for seven years and seven days".

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1. OCU IT.
  2. BBA p.16.
  3. Ir.: Béal I 296 (AT 300)xvi 119 (Finn tale); Scottish: WHT I 248 (AT 301); TGS I V 37.
  4. e.g. the enormous spreads in Breton oral descriptions of feasts, RC VI 66, III 339.
  5. Éigse I 13, ed M. Dillon.
  6. WHT I 174.



(e) Hunting

Hunting, especially of birds, is occasionally mentioned as a pastime in early Irish tales<sup>1</sup>. Sometimes the birds are magic ones which lead the pursuer into the Otherworld, a 'plot motif' which is used of birds and other animals hunted throughout the story-telling tradition. In the Finn-tales hunting, usually of deer and wild boar, is represented as the favourite occupation of Fionn and his men, occupying them all summer 'from Bealltain to Samhain'<sup>2</sup>. The setting of the hunt is especially popular in the later Finn tales and other Romantic tales, where it may reflect the interests of the Norman-Gaelic aristocracy. The huntsmen are not mounted, but rely on their hounds and retainers to drive the game to them.<sup>3</sup>

Decorative descriptions of the hunt appear in Early Modern Irish:<sup>4</sup>

- (22) "Do suidhighedh ocus do srethnaighedh in tsealg leó fo fheadhuibh ocus fo fhásaigib ocus fo fhanglenntuiph na ferann ba coimnesa dóip ocus fo muighib réidhe ro-áilli ocus fo chailltib clithardlúithe ocus fo dhoiredhuib dos-leathna dí móra. Ocus do chuaid gach duine fo leth d'fhianaib hÉrenn ina duma sealga ocus ina láthair licthe ocus ina berna baegail mar no gnáthaighdís cosgur gacha sealga do chur roimi sin".

"The hunt was arranged and spread out by them through the woods and desert places and sloping valleys of the country nearest them, through level very-beautiful plains and

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1. TBDD paras 13, 26; TBC I 11.680, 691; Compert CC para. 2; Serglige CC para. 7.

2. TGD p.258.

3. Acall 1.904.

4. A.Fhinn II §2.

through dense sheltering woods and through vast broad-bushy oak-groves. And each man of the Fianna of Ireland went aside to his hunting mound and his place for casting and his vantage point, as they were accustomed to take the spoil of every hunt before that".

The spreading out of the hunt is sometimes described with place names rather than common nouns<sup>1</sup>, in a conventional Irish setting. Other tales have more alliterating epithets<sup>2</sup>, and alliterative phrases describing the various terrains<sup>3</sup>. The huntsmen also take up their positions 'as was customary' in other tales<sup>4</sup>.

The noises of the hunt generally form part of the description<sup>5</sup>. These are often said to be Finn's favourite sounds; as when he sits in his duma selga with his hounds Bran and Sceolaing:

(23) "Ocus ba binn le Fionn in sel sin beith ac feithem is ac éistecht gotha na ngadhar ocus glaedh nglan ngrennmar na ngasradh, luadhaile na laechradh lánluthmar ocus tormain na dtréin-fher ocus fedgaire na féinne fa fhoraoisib fiadha fásaig na críche; gurba chlos do na cóigcnóchaib ba choimnesa dóib na gártha selga do léicetar, innus gur cuiread fiada as fhásaigib, ocus míolta ar mullaigib, ocus sionnaig ar sechrán, ocus bruic as broclasaib, ocus éin ar eitiollaig. Ocus do léicedh gach cú fhergach fhírneimnech da héill fa'n tulaig fa'n am sin."

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1. BCC SG p.306, TGD p.258.

2. FTC para. 1.

3. EMM p.1, six.

4. FTC para. 1, EMM p.1, EAG para. 3.

5. A. Fhinn II para. 6 (separately); BCC p.306 quoted.

"And Finn found it agreeable for that while to be watching and listening to the voices of the hounds and the clear clamorous call of the young men, the activity of the vigorous warriors and the hubbub of the champions and the whistling of the Fianna through the wild deserted forests of the area, so that the hunting cries they uttered would be heard in the neighbouring lands nearest them, so that deer were driven from desert places and hares from hills and badgers from sets, foxes set wandering and birds set flying. And at that time every angry truly-venomous hound round the knoll was released from its leash."

The spreading out of the hunt, the taking up of positions by the huntsmen and the noises generally form the content of the manuscript descriptions. Hunts are often described at the beginning of a tale, following an inverted opening sentence emphasizing the word sealg 'hunt' : Sealg romhór ro-fhairsing do commórad le Find, 'A great wide-spreading hunt was gathered by Find'.<sup>1</sup> In some cases the hunt is not described immediately, but is picked up in the next paragraph as an tseilg reamhraidhte 'the aforementioned hunt'. The language of the description is not fixed, though phrases recur: for example guth na gadhar and míolta— eit-iollaig from ex.<sup>(23)</sup> in Eachtra an Cheithearnaigh Chaoilnabhaigh.<sup>2</sup>

A description of hunting occurs occasionally in oral tales in Ireland. An oral version of BCC (Cronán Mhac Imilit)<sup>3</sup> describes the unleashing of the hounds with eight rhyming and

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1. A. Fhinn II para. 1; also: FTC, BCC, EMM, DGP, EAD, EAG.

2. p.280; other creatures: foxes, wolves, and madmen (geilti) in both BCC (GGG) p.67 and EGF p.10.

3. Béal II 26.



alliterating adjectives, and the spreading out of the hunt by referring to local place-names, as in some manuscript hunts. Finn appears: ag éisteacht le guth gadhar, le glam coileán 'listening to the voice of the hounds, the yelping of the pups'. In another oral Romantic tale<sup>1</sup>, the hero listens to the hounds and le fuaim slabhra, ag éisteacht le blaoch na bhfear anoir agus le feadiuol na bhfear aniar 'to the noise of chains, listening to the shouting of the men westwards and the whistling of the men eastwards'. The noise of chains (leashes?) also occurs in manuscript descriptions<sup>2</sup>. In another tale from the same parish,<sup>3</sup> the hero calls to his hounds: siolgaire míolgaire, sealgaire balgaire, fidín roidín, buidín boidín, maidín ro agus haigh ho haipun, an impressive but almost meaningless list of vocables. This description also includes the shouting and whistling of the men eastwards and westwards, suggesting a local oecotype of a hunting run. The oral descriptions seem always to be used as an opening flourish, as sometimes in manuscript tales.

(f) Welcoming

In early tales characters are usually made welcome in direct speech, using a conventional greeting<sup>4</sup>. However the very end of the manuscript tradition sees a formulaic 'welcoming run' develop in this position, and this run is regular in Irish and Scottish oral tales. Already in Eachtra Ghiolla an Fhiugha<sup>5</sup> when Murchadh

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1. Béal VI 116.

2. ECCR p.280.

3. Cárna, Connemara: IFC MS p.244 f.

4. Ch. IV ex.(2),(3); pp.70-71.

5. p.44.

is received by his mother and:

(24) "Is iongnadh nar mhúchsí re pógaibh é, agus nar bhaith sí re deóraibh é, agus thiormaigh sí re brataibh for-uaisle síoda agus sróil é,"

"It is a wonder she did not smother him with kisses nor drown him with tears, and she dried him with really noble silk and satin cloths,"

the run continues with her feeding him on the tastiest food and the oldest drink, keen intoxicating draughts (géura gabhála), Greek honey and Scandinavian beer. Mícheál Ó Donnchadha sometimes combined a welcoming run with a very similar description of a feast<sup>1</sup>, and the welcome is combined with the feast by other Irish tellers<sup>2</sup>, as well as on its own<sup>3</sup>. The wording is almost exactly that of the MS tales, but that it is no longer hypothetical, and the hero's lady friends often dry him with their own hair as well.<sup>4</sup> In Scotland a welcoming run more often follows the land-travelling run, and the wording is completely different: the hero's feet are washed and he is put to bed: Thug i dòibh uisge blàth gun casan is leaba bog fon leasan "She gave them warm water for their feet and a soft bed under their hips".<sup>5</sup>

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1. Béal XV 142 Ubhall Óir.

2. Béal V 10, Pádraig Ó Loingsigh, 296; XVIII 77, Seán Ó Briain; XVI 119; IV 324, 325, 326, 327.

3. Béal V 297, XXVIII 67, 70, XV 146, 147, 148, 149.

4. Béal VI 62; XV 142, 146, 147, 148, 149, Mícheál Ó Donnchadha.

5. W & S II 374.

CHAPTER VIIIDescriptions of Battle

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## Descriptions of Battle VIII

### (a) Arming

Although generally popular in heroic literature, a description of the hero arming does not appear in Gaelic narrative until fairly late - the earliest examples are Middle Irish. According to the Classical accounts and depictions of the Gauls<sup>1</sup>, and the earliest native tales, it was the custom of the Celtic warriors to fight naked: tornocht acht a n-armo namma 'Stark naked but for their weapons'<sup>2</sup>. The protective clothing and helmets characteristic of the later Gaelic arming descriptions would have been quite out of place in this primitive heroic tradition. In some tales<sup>3</sup> the hero simply takes up his weapons, and this may represent the original type. The earliest texts are those describing Cú Chulainn and Laeg arming in TBC BMM<sup>4</sup>, but these are very long and inflated like the rest of the episode, and presumably had antecedents now lost. The clothing and weapons described are closely related to those in the static tuarascbála of people. The items follow in their natural order, as the hero dresses himself and takes up his weapons. A good example illustrating this basic pattern, and also early enough to preserve the accusative case, is that in Eachtra Airt meic Cuind:<sup>5</sup>

- (1) "Ocus do éirigh an macam ocus do gab a errad comraic uime  
 .i. inar suaire sróllaighi uime ocus an mbánfhuathróic  
 mbrecsholus do ór órloiscthe re imtús a medóin. Ocus do  
 gabustar a dond-chathbarr dígrais dergóir ima cheand. Et

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1. J. Tierney 1960 p.198; Diodorus Siculus V 29.2.

2. TBC I 1.3938.

3. T.Ferbe II 1.300; Forb.DD paras. 82,84; Fog.CC para. 35.

4. I 11. 2189,2213.

5. EAC para. 28.

do ghabh a sciath mbocóidech mbáncorera ar sduaighleirg a droma. Et do gabh a chloidemh clais-lethan co indill gorm, et do gabh a dhá shléigh crand-reamhra crochbhuighiocus indsaighis cach a chéle díbh."

"And the lad rose up and put on his battle gear, that is, a pleasant satin jacket, and a white bright-speckled apron of refined gold around his middle. And he put his peerless brown helmet of red gold on his head. And he put his bossed light-purple shield on the arching slope of his back. And he took his wide-grooved sword with a dark-blue hilt, and he took his two thick-shafted red-yellow spears, and each of them attacked the other."

The native garments of inar and fuathróg are the only protective clothing worn in the earlier arming descriptions. Laeg<sup>1</sup> wears a deerskin inar and Cú Chulainn<sup>2</sup> a fuathróg of leather over one of satin. Fer Diad<sup>3</sup> wears an iron fuathróg on top of leather and satin ones. Cú Chulainn also wears a battle-belt(cath-chrios). It seems that both this and the fuathróg 'loin cloth, apron', could cover the whole torso.<sup>4</sup>

However,<sup>in</sup> the description of Achilles arming in Togail Troi<sup>5</sup>, he wears a luírech 'coat of mail', a borrowing of Latin lorica;

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1. TBC I 12192.

2. TBC I 1.2223f.

3. TBC II CFD 1.3248.

4. fuathróg to armpits MU II 1.645; cathchrios from waist to armpits TBC I BMM 1.2221, from loins to shoulders C.Cath 1.4671, from thigh to chin CRR II para. 27.

5. LL 32999.

and in later Gaelic tales this becomes a regular part of the description, often as well as the native garments.<sup>1</sup> Some of these examples add a further piece of armour, the scabal or 'shoulder piece' (from Latin scapula)<sup>2</sup>. Finally in Caithréim Thóirdhealbhaigh and later tales there appears the cotún, 'acton', a borrowing of Middle English cotoun<sup>3</sup>. This was a quilted coat to the knees for protection in battle in the Middle Ages, and often represented on tomb effigies in Ireland and north-west Scotland, where the vertical ribs of quilting appearing under chain mail give the appearance of a pleated kilt.<sup>4</sup> Thus, as with the static tuarascbála of people, the arming descriptions also reflect changing fashions in the Gaelic world. Helmets (cathbarr or clogad) appear throughout the manuscript arming descriptions. The arming description gains in popularity as the tuarascbála of people are gradually abandoned, but in some late manuscript tales, during the currency of both types, warriors at rest are also described in full armour of mailcoat, acton, shoulder-piece (scabal) and helmet<sup>5</sup>.

Helmets, (often hats, hata, in Ireland),<sup>6</sup> lúireach, and cotún (often simply còta in Scotland) are preserved in the arming runs of oral tradition. Except for the description of Cú Chulainn

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1. CML para. 81; OCT para. 20; A.Fhinn II para. 31.

2. OCT para. 20, A.Fhinn II para. 31.

3. Caithr. Thoir. pp.39,63; TTT 11.1389,3147,4608; TGG p.44; BBA LSS pp. 30-1.

4. H. McClintock, 1950, p.67; Illustr. No. 17 etc.

5. TTT 1.3565, BCL p.289.

6. Béal I 230, 358.



arming in TBC BMM, the léine 'shirt' is rarely mentioned, except in rather late manuscript examples<sup>1</sup>. The silken shirt which appears in these is preserved in oral tradition in Ireland and Scotland. In Scotland the shirt is regularly described as yellow, its historic colour in 15th-16th century Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

The weapons in manuscript descriptions of arming are rarely different from those of the static tuarascbála of warriors, a sword, two spears and a shield, though in one late tale<sup>3</sup> the old tradition is garbled when the hero boldly takes up two each of three different kinds of spear: sleagh, craísech, and manaís. The position of the shield ar stuaigleirg a dhroma given in ex.(1) is virtually stereotyped in manuscript descriptions of arming.<sup>4</sup> The phrase is also used in static descriptions of armed warriors (see above), and occasionally in oral tradition<sup>5</sup>. The epithets of the shield in ex (1)<sup>6</sup> are also very close to those current orally in Ireland and Scotland. The weapons in oral tradition are a sword and a shield, with the addition in Scotland of a club and a dirk, found in some manuscript descriptions.<sup>7</sup> A further element in some manuscript versions is the description of the warrior's horse<sup>8</sup>, which also appears in oral tradition<sup>9</sup>. Gauntlets

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1. EAD para. 24; TTT 1.1389; EGF p.32.

2. Ch. VI p.164.

3. BEBD pp.72-3.

4. TBC II CFD 1.3260; A. Fhian II para. 31; TTT 1.3147 etc.

5. LSIC p.239.

6. also EMM p.4.

7. Caithr. Thoir pp. 39,63; EGF pp. 30,40.

8. C. Cath 1.4733; ERL 1.288; EGF p.30.

9. Irish: Béal V7, XV 55 (Bladhmann mac an Ubhaill, P. Ó Loingsigh; Ubhaill Oir, Mícheál Ó Donnchadha); Scottish: LF pp.210, 211.

(lámhainn)<sup>1</sup> and greaves or shoes (assa, bróga)<sup>2</sup> appear in some manuscript descriptions; bróga and spurs (spuir) in late tales and in oral tradition in Ireland<sup>3</sup>.

The description of arming in manuscript tales is often very long and elaborate, the most extreme examples being those referring to Pompey and Caesar in Cath Cathardha —the second well over a hundred lines in the printed edition<sup>4</sup>. In some tales it is simply the numbers of alliterating adjectives that are increased.<sup>5</sup>

In Tóraighecht Taise Taoibhghile the hero puts on his battle-dress:

- (2) "i. a léne shreabhnaidhe shn. áth-choel shíor-édrocht, agus a chotún corr-chuanna cortharach cádas-ghlan agus a lúireach leabhar lánrighin lucht-fhairsing."

"that is, his filmy fine-threaded ever-splendid shirt, and his fine-sharp fringed protecting bright acton, and his long, tough, fully-roomy mailcoat".

Strings of alliterating epithets, as in the early descriptions of horses, also appear: twenty describing an army's swords<sup>6</sup>, sixteen describing a mailcoat:<sup>7</sup> and traces of this technique appear in the Scottish oral runs.

1. C. Cath 1.4675; CML para. 81; ERL 1.288; TGG p.44.

2. C. Cath 11. 4664, 5205; TGG p.44; EGF p.30.

3. EGF p.30; Béal I.99, XII 141, XV 155.

4. TBC BMM I 1.2213 f, II 1.2230 f; TBC II CFD 1.3246 f; A. Fhinn II para. 31; TGG p.44; C. Cath 11.4660-739, 5203-335.

5. TTT 1.1392. Also: Caithr. Thoir. pp. 39, 63.

6. Cog. p.160.

7. Caithr. Thoir. p.39.

In other descriptions of arming the account of each item is inflated with phrases giving further information about its material and decoration, its component parts and its past history. The first line (to fosgadh) of the following account of Cú Chulainn's sword in an arming description<sup>1</sup> recurs in another example<sup>2</sup>:

- (3) "Do ghabh a chlaidhemh trom tortbhuillech, go bfeid go bfigh go bfosgadh, go gcruas cruaidh-iaroinn, go ccíocrus foladh flannruaidhi, go ttruaill fada fiondruinne, go ccresaibh áille airgid a n-ardgabháil goili ocus gaisge ara thaobh".

"He put his weighty heavy-smiting sword, with its whistle, its shaft, its apertures (?), with the hardness of hard iron, with the hunger for scarlet-red blood, with a long scabbard of findruine, with beautiful belts of silver, in a support of valour and might high on his side"

The shield is another item often given particular attention:<sup>3</sup>

- (4) "Tarraid a sciath scothamlach scáthuaine co mbuailtib breca bitháilli do bánór, ocus co comradaib finnáille finndruine, ocus co slabraduib sníthi sesmachá senairgit for sduaghlarg a dhruma"

"(Finn) seized his bright-green shaded flowery shield with speckled ever-beautiful rings of pale gold, and with light beautiful bosses of white bronze, and with sturdy woven chains of ancient silver, on the arching slope of his back."

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1. Fog. CC para. 35.

2. C. Cumair §11.

3. A. Fhinn II para. 31.



Caesar's shield<sup>1</sup> has a shield belt (sciathrach) of lion-skin, an iron border (imelbord) and point (loss) bosses (cobrad) designs of various animals: toads, lions, dragons, griffins and serpents, and pagan spells written on it.

The warrior's helmet, sometimes further surmounted by a diadem(mind<sup>2</sup>), is often covered in jewels. Fer Diad's helmet<sup>3</sup> is decorated with enamel, crystal, and carbuncle; while Pompey's diadem, his 'sign of emperorship', has a border of red gold with rows of crystal and carbuncle, designs of animal forms, two 'horns' with gems from India and chimes which are binnither téta mendchrot, and a jewel in front which makes night as bright as day. Caesar's diadem is decorated with pearls, and Indian gems which have been brought in the claws of birds 'over the fiery mountain from Adam's paradise'<sup>4</sup>. In Cath Maige Léana the minn ardríg is decorated with Indian carbuncles that make night as bright as day; in other tales African gems have this property<sup>5</sup>. Various articles in the manuscript arming descriptions are said to come from Manannán, or Tír Tairngire, the Gaelic Otherworld: a jacket<sup>6</sup> a shirt,<sup>7</sup> or armour<sup>8</sup>. In one later tale Cú Chulainn wears

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1. C. Cath. 11.5325-32.

2. C. Cath 11.4703, 5283; CML para. 81.

3. TBC II CFD 1.3255.

4. C. Cath 11.4703, 5283.

5. BEBD p.72.

6. TBC II BMM 1.2260; CML para. 81.

7. A. Fhinn II para. 31.

8. OCT para. 20.

Manannán's own helmet, covered with designs of animals and African gems: mar atá diamond, tofas berol agus onix 'such as diamond, topaz, beryl and onyx': a final learned flourish<sup>1</sup>.

The other type of inflation found in manuscript descriptions of arming is to multiply each item. In TBC Brislech Maige Muirthemne Cú Chulainn puts on twenty-seven waxed shirts<sup>2</sup> under his battle belt. The other arming descriptions which include waxed shirts have presumably borrowed from this, since they generally also quote the number<sup>3</sup>. As already mentioned, Fer Diad<sup>4</sup> wears three fuathróga, one on top of the other, and Pompey<sup>5</sup> wears a mailcoat of electrum over one of iron. In the same description Pompey puts on leggings (bráici), and over them in turn greaves (assan) of satin, lionskin, iron, and electrum.<sup>6</sup> Many descriptions emphasize that the hero puts each garment on top of (ar uachtar) the one before<sup>7</sup>, so that in Tóraigheacht Gruaidhe Griansholus Cú Chulainn puts on a mailcoat over a fuathróg over an acton over twenty-seven waxed shirts. In the independent Scottish arming run describing Murchadh mac Briain<sup>8</sup> each item 'was wrapped around' (do dh'iathas mu) the one before: two belts round the mailcoat round the breastplate round the acton round Murchadh's shirt.

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1. TGG p.44.

2. I 1.2216 II 1.2233,

3. A. Fhinn II para. 31 (24); TGG p.44 (27), CML para. 81.

4. TBC II CFD 1.3247f.

5. C. Cath 11.4672-83.

6. 11.4662-70.

7. A. Fhinn II para. 31; Caithr. Thoir. p.39.

8. LF p.210.

Shields in the manuscript arming descriptions often have multiple bosses: five<sup>1</sup> or seven subsidiary bosses arranged around the central one, 'like little houses round a royal house, or low hillocks round a high hill'.<sup>2</sup>

### Oral Versions

The basic contents of the arming description do not vary, and the opening line is fairly fixed throughout the manuscript tradition: Is andso rogab a chatherred catha ocus comraic ocus comlaind<sup>3</sup>; Is ann sin do gab Conn a eirred catha uime<sup>4</sup>; Ocus do ghab a chulaid catha ocus comlainn uime<sup>5</sup>. As with other conventional descriptions, the opening line is often given alone in subsequent occurrences<sup>6</sup>. The same opening line is clearly recognizable in oral versions:<sup>7</sup>

- (5) "Dh'éiridh mi dhol ann am threallaichean cath agus comhraig. Chuir mi orm mo léine sheuntaidh sheumh de'n t-sròl's de 'n t-sìoda shleamhuinn bhuidhe, sìnte ri'm chraicinn; mo chòta caoimh cotain air uachdar a'chaomh bhroitinn, mo sgiath bhucaideach bhacaideach bharra-chaol air mo thaobh clì; mo shlachdanta cruaidh curaidh annam làimh dheis; m'iuchair sginnichdinn chaol air mo chrìos, mo chlogada cruadhach mam' cheann a'dhìon mo mhaise mhullaich, a dhol an toiseach na h-iorguill's an iorghuill a'dol na deireadh. Chuir mi orm mo lùireach thorantach, shìth-thorantach, chorra-ghleasda, gun fhòtas na gun òs, ghormghlas, ghormghlan, leudar leothar Lochlannach, fhada aotrom inntinneach."

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1. TBC II CFD 1.3260.
  2. C. Cath 1.5316; Fog. CC para. 35.
  3. TBC BMM I 1.2214.
  4. CML para. 81.
  5. BBA p.340.
  6. TGG p.80; TTT 1.1930.
  7. Scottish: WHT II 228 (DGP).



"I got up to get into my gear for battle and conflict. I put on my charmed mild shirt of satin and slippery yellow silk laid against my skin, my fair cotton coat on top of the fair garment, my bossed knobbed narrow-topped shield on my left side, my hard champion's club in my right hand, my narrow protruding key on my belt, my hard helmet on my head to protect my splendid pate, going into the strife and the strife retreating. I put on my thundering, peacefully thundering mailcoat, in good condition, without flaw, without ? , dark-blue grey, bright dark-blue, harmonious broad Scandinavian, long, light-weight, high-spirited."

This was recorded in 1859, the following Irish example in 1927:<sup>1</sup>

- (6) "Bhuaill se 'mis (uime) a lúirthneach lóirthneach lochlainneach; a sciath iachóidúil airigeadúil; a léine shíoda shíbhriste, hata daingean dobhriste, bhí biogóideach báindearg; a chloidheamh briotúnach colgnimhneach ar a thaobh clé go bonntáisteach, agus a ainm scríte thuas ar uachtar a scéithe na litreacha Rómhánacha, gurbh é féin saoi geacha catha, buadh geach a b'fhearr, sás a chirt a thagairt i dtír namhaid, gan cóir ná ceart a thabhairt uaidh, le méid a bhuille, le géire a scine, le buadh a ghaisce's a chloidhimh! "
- "He flung on his ? Scandinavian mailcoat, his ? silvern shield, his silken well-broken shirt, his strong badly-broken hat, which was spotted and pale-red; his British poison-tipped sword advantageously on his left side, and his name written on the top of his shield in Roman

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1. Irish: Béal I 310 (Kerry).

letters; that he was himself the master of every battle, the excellence of all that was best; the means of announcing his claim in the land of the enemy, without right or justice being taken from him, with the strength of his blow, the sharpness of his knife, and the virtue of his warriorship and his sword."

This run was not one of the commonest in oral tradition (I have about twenty examples from printed tales from Ireland and Scotland) but nevertheless seems to have been the most highly regarded. In Ireland culaidh ghaisce 'battle-dress' became the general term for all oral runs<sup>1</sup>. The Scottish example quoted describes Murchadh mac Briain, and a run describing Murchadh and his horse (as in EGF p.30), seems to have been current as a separate piece in the 19th century.<sup>2</sup> Another piece recorded separately, called 'Putting Eoghan O'Neill on Horseback' (Eóghan Ó Néill a Chuir air Each), seems to be a parody of it.<sup>3</sup> A further arming run which seems to have had a semi-independent existence in Scotland is Moladh Chlaidheimh Chonaill 'The Praise of Conall's Sword',<sup>4</sup> referring to Conall Gulban and also found in Scottish oral versions of ECG<sup>5</sup>. Another passage recorded from 18th century Scottish oral tradition gives a unique description of Cú Chulainn's sword.<sup>6</sup>

All the Irish examples I have used were recorded in the twentieth century, so that it is therefore not surprising that the Scottish runs collected in the 19th century often preserve more of the language and features of the manuscript descriptions: the scabal and spears<sup>7</sup>, the motif that a weapon can cut a hair in

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1. J. Delargy 1945 p.34n.

2. LF p.210, An Gaidheal IV 146.

3. LF p.11.

4. LF p.209.

5. TGS I LXIV 168, Angus Maclellan: introduced by : Agus sin nuair a rinneadh moladh a chlaidheimh 'And that is when the praise of the sword was made'.

6. LF p.1.

7. LF p.210.

a stream<sup>1</sup>, the series of alliterating adjectives describing a horse<sup>2</sup>. Scottish runs describe animal designs on the shield, but the written boast regular in Irish oral runs also appears in manuscript tales<sup>3</sup>. Irish versions also often have a fuller description of the sword, with multiple blades: faobhar 'un bearradh, faobhar 'un ghearradh, faobhar os cionn faobhair agus treas-fhaobhar 'an edge for shearing, and an edge for cutting, an edge over an edge and a third edge'. Irish runs have some humorous elements which are less evident in Scotland: the battledress of eelskin (coitín craicinn easconn) or rubber (culaith 'india rubber')<sup>4</sup>; the horse with three qualities each from a woman, a bull, a fox and a hare<sup>5</sup>.

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1. TBC I BMM 1.2235; Fog.CC para. 35; LF p.209; TGS I XIII 77.

2. Ch.VI a, exx. 16, 17; C.Cath 1.473; LF p.210.  
pp.190,192.

3. EGF pp. 30, 40; BEED LSS p.73.

4. Béal XV 155, VI 65 - both Galway tellers.

5. Béal V 11 Kerry, XV 155 Galway; also EGF p.30; Eóghan Ó Néill  
do chuir air each.



(b) Fighting

Descriptions of fighting become popular in the literature at about the same time as the descriptions of arming, from the Middle Irish period on and especially in the Romantic tales and in oral tradition. There are some earlier examples, but these already show the innovations in weaponry and armour illustrated in the arming descriptions. However where these, by their mention of specific items and details of decoration, reflect the development of actual fighting equipment, the descriptions of fighting are largely impressionistic, and only achieve any sort of fixed content or form in oral tradition. Battles, combats of one man against odds, and single combats are all described in manuscript, but only the second and third in oral tales.

Battle-fury

The excitement of the fight is often built up by preliminary description of the combatants and their anticipation, including the ancient motif of battle-fury, in which the character cannot tell friend from foe and the luan laích 'warrior's moon' rises above his head<sup>1</sup>. Cú Chulainn in particular goes through a whole series of physical distortions, description of which appears in various tales<sup>2</sup>. The longest example\*, of thirty-three lines, is virtually a succession of motifs, several of which also appear in descriptions of ugly supernaturals. Cú Chulainn\*<sup>3</sup> shakes all over, his feet and knees come to the front, his sinews bulge, one eye sinks into his head while the other protrudes, his mouth gapes so that his liver

1. FDG 1.234; FB para. 25.

2. TBC I 11.428, 1651; FB para. 27; Serglige CC para. 5; Scéala Conchobair (Ériu IV 30) para. 20.

3. TBC BMM I 1.2245f, II 1.2262f.

and lungs are visible, he snaps his jaw and sparks come out, his heart pounds, his hair bristles so that it would impale apples which fell on it, the luan laích rises from his forehead and a stream of blood from his crown. In some examples<sup>1</sup> there is a further motif: that he has a drop of blood at the end of every hair, also used of Cú Chulainn in a state of exhaustion in TBC<sup>2</sup>.

Several of these motifs are used together in later tales to describe the battle-fury<sup>3</sup>, or simply anger, of characters in other tales<sup>4</sup>. In others a more general account of hands speeding up, hearts hardening and faces changing colour is used<sup>5</sup>. Battle-fury is not described in oral tradition.

### Challenge

In manuscript tales the fight sometimes begins with a battle-cry<sup>6</sup>. In the Romantic tales a challenging blow struck on the shield<sup>7</sup>, or on a special combat post (cuaille comhraic)<sup>8</sup>, becomes increasingly common before single combats. The effects of the blow make buildings shake, and men and beasts are frightened by the noise. In late manuscript tales<sup>9</sup> pregnant women and animals within earshot miscarry through fright, and this motif appears in Irish oral tradition<sup>10</sup>.

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1. FB para. 27, Scéla Conchobair para. 20.
  2. II 4005, 4029.
  3. T.Troí I 1.32327, II 1.1473; CF pp. 54-5; ECRI p.88.
  4. Aisl. MC I p.51.
  5. TTT 1.3505, Acall. 1.6490.
  6. CMT (ii) para. 132; CRR II para. 29; A. Fhinn II para. 35.
  7. TDG Oss. p.94; ERL 1.3987.
  8. Sg.R 1.5900.
  9. Sg.R 1.5900.
  10. Béal I 44, IV 88, VI 70.

Descriptions of battles generally begin with the two sides making for each other<sup>1</sup>. One of the earliest of such descriptions is that in Cath Maige Mucrime, apparently 9th century<sup>2</sup>:

- (1) "Is and trá for-fópart cehtar na dá ergal dochum araile. Amnass immorro in gress ro llásat for cehtar na da leitthe. Amainsi na tadbsin ro bátar and .i. findnél na caeilce ocus ind aeil dochum inna nél asnaib sciathaib ocus asnaib boccóitib oca n-essorgain de fhaebraib na claideb ocus de imfhaebraib na ngae ocus na saiget iarna ndegaursclugud dona curadaib; ocus béimnech ocus briscbruar na mboccóti iarna truastad dena calggaib ocus dina buirgib; in tairbrech dina díbairgthib na n-arm, in toescad ocus in tinsaitin na fola ocus na cró a ballaib na n-écland ocus tré thoebu na míled."

"Then each of the two battle lines rushed towards the other. Violent then was the attack each side launched against the other. Violent the sights there, that is, the white cloud of chalk and lime cloudwards from the shields and bucklers being struck by the edges of swords and the double-edged blades of spears and arrows being well warded off by the champions. And the crashing and smashing of the bucklers being smitten by swords and rocks. The piercing hail of the flights of weapons, the gushing and dripping of blood and gore from the limbs of the fighting-men and through the sides of the warriors."

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1. T. Troí I 1.32507; Cog. para. 99; CRR II para. 29; A. Fhinn II para. 35.

2. I para. 52, M. O'Daly pp. 17-18.



Arrows, a borrowing from Latin sagitta, are never mentioned in the static tuarascbála of warriors, and seem to have been unknown to the early Irish. Likewise the chalking of the shields, widely referred to in battle-descriptions, is not mentioned in the static tuarascbála, though shields are fairly often said to be 'white' (gel)<sup>1</sup>, which may signify the same thing. The cloud of chalk raised from the shields during the battle is early accompanied by a shower of sparks from the weapons<sup>2</sup>. In the Romantic tales the clouds become a triad composed of chalk, sparks and blood<sup>3</sup>, and this motif appears in the fighting description in both Irish and Scottish oral tradition<sup>4</sup>.

In many examples the noises<sup>5</sup> of the clashing weapons are augmented by the cries of carrion birds. Ravens were doubly associated with battlefields as one of the forms taken by the pagan war-goddess Bodb<sup>6</sup>. However in CMM I the air is black not with ravens but with demons waiting to take the souls of those fated to die to hell<sup>7</sup>. In Tain Bó Cualnge<sup>8</sup> bánánaig ocus bocánaig ocus geinití glinne ocus demna áeoir 'goblins and sprites, spirits of the glen and demons of the air', cry out prophesying bloodshed

1. TBC I TB 11.3599,3762.

2. FB para. 15.

3. Acall. 1.7585, BEED p.107, EGF p.42.

4. Ir.: Beal V 12 Kerry, 101; Galway XII 89, Mayo.Sc.: WHT II 480.

5. T. Ferbe II 1.328; Imth. Aen. 1.2488; C.Airtig para. 14; TTT 1.1555.

6. T.Troí I 1.32510, CML para. 95, Caithr. Thoir. para. 112.

7. para. 51.

8. TBC I BMM 1.2240, II:2257.

when Cú Chulainn dons his armour, and these, plus badhbha bélderga 'red-beaked ravens' and arrachta foluaimnecha na firamentí 'fluttering spectres of the sky', cry out round Fionn<sup>1</sup>. In many manuscript tales a long list of supernatural creatures cry out encouraging the battle<sup>2</sup>. These do not appear in oral tradition.

### Carnage

The resultant carnage is the part of the battle-scene which earliest gains a recurring description in tales. In Old Irish the hero's achievements (or intentions) are often depicted by one grim understatement: the enemy's dead outnumber their living (bit lia a mairb oldáte a mbeí)<sup>3</sup>, or nothing escapes but what birds carry away in their claws (acht na mberat éoin ina crobaib)<sup>4</sup>, or is despatched by the weapons (cona dechadar acht a ndeachaid do rind gaí ocus do gein chlaidib)<sup>5</sup>. These also appear in later tales<sup>6</sup>. TBC BMM ends the description of carnage with only one in three of the Men of Ireland surviving, one eyed, with broken haunches and broken heads<sup>7</sup>. In later tales no fear innste sgeíl iná maoidhte mórghníomh 'man to tell the tale or boast the mighty deed' escapes from the hero's onslaught,<sup>8</sup> and the hero of several

1. A. Fhinn II para. 40.

2. Cog. para. 99; BEED p.85.

3. FB paras. 5,21; TBDD paras. 85, 94, 103.

4. TBDD para. 62; MU II 1.928.

5. Sc. Cano para. 3; Lg. para. 15.

6. ECRI p.152; TTT 1.3450

7. TBC BMM I 1.2330, II 1.2335.

8. TGD Oss. pp.92,167; EAD paras. 20, 26.

oral Scottish arming runs<sup>1</sup> leaves no fear innseadh sgeòil na maoidheadh an tuairisgeòil 'man who would tell the tale or boast of the account', unless he were one-eyed, one-eared, and one-kneed.

Another type of description lists the severed limbs left on the battlefield, first appearing in a threat by Fergus in Táin Bó Cualnge.<sup>2</sup> <sup>TBC BMM</sup> collects each type of limb together: torcratar bond fri bond ocus méide fri méide 'They fell sole of foot to sole of foot, and headless neck to headless neck'. In late manuscript tales<sup>3</sup> the remains are gathered into three heaps, a cairn of heads, a cairn of bodies, and a cairn of spoils, and this is common in Irish oral tradition<sup>4</sup>.

#### Elaborations

As well as developing these motifs which continue to modern Gaelic oral tradition, fighting descriptions in manuscript tales are often considerably elaborated in their form; ornamented with alliteration, and extended by repetition of the same rhythmic and syntactic pattern. This elaboration can be applied to any of the established sections of the description:

the appearance of the army<sup>5</sup>,

(2)a "Ba fírglan faircsi for féinnedaib na Frigia inn uairsin ri lánglaini na laech luath lónbailc, ri taitnemaigi na tréfnher tend trénbuillech, ri cáimi na curad cródata cruadgér, ri álli na n-anruth anathlam imderg ..."

(9 repetitions of the pattern).

1. LF p.209; TGS I XLIV 168; WHT II 172,228.

2. TBC I 1.4010; Caithr. Thoir. p.117, TBC BMM I 1.2309, II 2315.

3. Sg.R. 11.1105,6695.

4. Béal I 232, VII 200, XV 155; LSIC p.239; a Scottish example is quoted by A. Bruford, 1966 p.205 n.17.

5. TTroí I 1.32487.



"At that time it was truly splendid to survey the fighting-men of Phrygia, because of the full brightness of the swift fierce bold warriors, and the shining of the firm strong-blown strongmen, and the handsomeness of the hard keen bloodstained champions, and the beauty of the resolute crimson heroes..."

the battle-distortions of the warriors,<sup>1</sup>

- (b) "Ocus do maelgormaighedar na maelshúili mórliatha malachgharbha agus do comhdhranntaigheadar na cláirfhiacra craebhghlasa cnáim-reamhca cogantacha craesfhairsinga agus do chasadar na cromsróna cuasleathna comtharrthacha craebhshilteacha."

"And the large grey rough-browed deepset eyes became dark and sunken, and the green-branching stout-boned chewing broad-jawed front teeth snarled, and the wide-nostrilled vengeful streaming bent noses sneered."

the onset,<sup>2</sup>

- (c) "Is annsin ro innsaid cach a céile díb co dána díbraichtech duthrachtach agus co fergach fortren feramail agus co laechda lámhláidir léomanta agus co ferrda fortill fírárachta."
- "Then each of them made for the other, fiercely hurling missiles, eagerly; angrily very strongly, manlily; heroically with strong arm, lionlike; as befits men, dominantly, vigorously..."

the fight,<sup>3</sup>

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1. CF 284.

2. NFF para. 8: Stair Nuadat Find Femuin ed. & tr. (German) K. Muller-Lisowski, ZCP XIII (1920) 195-250.

3. TTT 3493.

- (d) "Ocus ro fhearadur comhrac dísgir dána dásachtach, agus deabhaidh dhífhreagra dhoi-fhreasdail agus gleó gaífeach géroglá garbh-aigmheil agus troid thalchair thréin-neartmhur thinneasnach, gur chríohtnaigh an talamh trom-athlamh tréin-adhbhal fa throighthibh na ttréinfhear ..."

"And they offered fierce bold furious combat, and unanswerable uncontrovertible strife, and a dangerous sharp-fearsome rough-enormous battle, and a violent strong-vigorous impetuous fight, so that the heavy-nimble strong vast earth trembled under the feet of the champions..."

or<sup>1</sup>

- (e) "Tugadar saithte santacha sárлуatha dá sleaghaibh sliopa slinngheara agus dá gcraoiseachaibh craosacha cró-fhairsinge a gcorpaibh agus a gcneasaibh a cheille, ionnus gur briseadh agus gur brúghadh na ceinnbheirte, gur tolladh agus gur treaghdadh na lúireachadh, gur sgoilteadh agus gur sgabadh na sgiatha." (6 repetitions of the pattern)

"They sent eager very-swift swarms of their polished sharp-bladed spears and of their greedy wide-socketed javelins into each others' bodies and skins, so that helmets were broken and smashed, mailcoats were holed and pierced, shields were split and shattered."

the noises<sup>2</sup>,

- (f) "Scolgaire na sgiath ag a scoltad agus drongair na lúrech línech ag a laechbrised agus coicetal na claideb re círuib na cathbarr agus létgaire na laechraide."

"The clangour of the shields being split and the din of the

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1. TGG p.50.

2. A. Fhinn II para. 35.

chased mailcoats being broken by warriors and the music of the swords on the crests of helmets and the clash of the warrior-bands."

and the carnage,<sup>1</sup>

- (g) "Ocus do b'iomda ... cluas arna ciorrbugad ocus cos arna cnáimgherrad ocus lám ar ledrad ocus corp arna ciorrbad ocus taeb arna tollad."<sup>7</sup>(repetitions of pattern)

"And there were many ....ears shorn and legs cut through the bone and arms mangled and bodies hacked and sides pierced."

### Oral Versions

In later manuscript tales this elaboration of style is often all that distinguishes the frequent descriptions of fighting from the surrounding narrative. However, in modern Irish and Scottish oral tradition the descriptions of fighting have developed fixed contents and form, and are inserted by the teller into any suitable tale, as with other oral runs.<sup>1\*</sup> However there are various types, and an exceptional teller might know more than one.<sup>2</sup> Most oral runs describe single combats, but another type, of one man against odds, appears as a separate description in both oral<sup>3</sup> and late manuscript tales<sup>4</sup>. This makes great use of comparisons, see below.<sup>p.271.</sup> The single combat of oral tradition is often a wrestling match rather than a fight with weapons<sup>5</sup>:

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1. DBA p.341.
  - 1\*. e.g. P. Ó Gribhthín, Kerry: Béal I 385, III 383, 393; A. MacNeil, Barra: WHT II 178, 198, 445.
  2. P. Ó Loingsigh, Kerry; Béal V (Bladhmann mac an Ubhaill): pp.7,9 (see below), 12, three descriptions of single combat; p.8, lone warrior against an army.
  3. Béal XV 155 Galway; WHT II 226 Scotland (DGP).
  4. TDG Oss. pp.92,167; EAD paras. 20,26; Sg.R. 11. 1105,2569,6695.
  5. Irish: Béal V p.9 (Bladhmann mac an Ubhaill).



- (3) "Riugadar ar a cheile. Bhuaileadar lámh i n-íochtar agus lámh i n-uachtar agus lámh i mbuaic na h-íomrascála; is dá dtiocfaí ó íochtar an domhain go h-uachtar an domhain a féachaint ar dá íomrascálaí's ortha araon ba chóir teacht a féachaint.

Dheinidís talamh bog don talamh cruaidh agus talamh cruaidh do'n talamh bog, árdán do'n ísleán is ísleán do'n árdán, is thairrigidís toibreacha fíor-uisce trí croidhe na gclocha glasa aníos."

"They got to grips with each other. They struck a hand below and a hand above and a hand <sup>at the top of</sup> the combat, and if one were to come from the underneath of the world to the top of the world to see two combatants it would be proper to come and see them together. They were making soft ground of hard ground and hard ground of soft ground, high ground of low and low ground of high, and were drawing springs of fresh water from below through the heart of the grey stones."

Some of these motifs appear in descriptions in late manuscript tales. The fight which would be worth travelling from the ends of the earth to see<sup>1</sup> is sometimes expressed in a more learned fashion: it would be worth coming from the Garden of the Hesperides in the west of the world to Cathair na d-Tuathfhine<sup>2</sup>. The effects of hard ground made soft and high ground low, and vice versa, and the discovery of springs, appear in Eachtra Ghiolla an Fhiugha<sup>3</sup>, and the effects on the ground appear in one of the Sgéalta Romansuíochta tales<sup>4</sup>

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1. EGF p.42.

2. GGG p.56.

3. p.42.

4. Sg.R 1.7783.

in a form close to the Scottish oral run <sup>below:</sup> dheunaidis bogan do'n chreagan agus creagan don bhogan 'They were making bog of the rock, and rock of the bog'. The Irish version above, from Kerry, continues with an extravagant account of the clods thrown up by the feet of the combatants: one would travel through bog and mountain till it struck three teeth from the mouth of an old woman sitting smoking her pipe in London, and the teeth would travel through woods and moors with such force that they destroyed three mansions in the Western World. This flourish appears in other Kerry versions<sup>1</sup>. An alternative motif, also in Bladmann mac an Ubhaill<sup>2</sup>, says that the fighters would make the whitebacked yellow cow behind the hill that had never seen a bull, drop a whitebacked black calf<sup>3</sup>. In Irish oral runs the victor of the wrestling match usually drives his (giant) opponent by degrees into the ground, first to the knees, then to the waist, then to the neck<sup>4</sup>. In Scotland the loser is thrown:<sup>5</sup>

- (4) "Dheanadh iad bogan air a'chreagan agus creagan air a'bhogan. Anuair a b'isle rachadh iad fodha, rachadh iad fodha gu an sùilean, 's an uair a b'airde rachadh iad fodha rachadh iad fodha gu an glùinean. Ach smuaintich Iain Òg an seo gu robh e fad'o a chairdean agus goirid o a naimhdean. Thug e an togail shunndach shanntach aighearach<sup>uàa</sup>'s chuir e seachad air mullach a chinn e; 's bhuail e a chliathach ris an talamh 's bhrisd e dà aisinn fodha's té os a chionn."

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1. Béal. III 82, 383.
  2. p.12.
  3. Béal. II 125, III 82.
  4. Béal. IV 38, VIII 202.
  5. MWHT I 232.

"They would make bog of the rock and rock of the bog. When they sank most deeply they would sink to their eyes, when they sank most shallowly they sank to their knees. But at this time Iain Òg thought he was far from his friends and near to his enemies, and he threw him forth onto the top of his head, and he struck his ribcage on the ground and broke two ribs under him and one above."

The battling Fenians in one manuscript tale<sup>1</sup> are also spurred on by remembering fad a ccarad agus foigsi a n-easccarad "the distance from their friends and nearness to their enemies," and this is common in Scottish oral runs. In Irish oral runs the encouragement often comes from a bird, usually a robin<sup>2</sup>, which addresses the hero. Another incentive to finish the fight is the coming of darkness. This is common in manuscript tales<sup>3</sup>, but in Irish oral tradition a description of the coming of night<sup>4</sup> is sometimes added to the fighting run<sup>5</sup>.

### Comparisons

A distinctive feature of Gaelic fighting descriptions is the great use they make of comparisons. In the account of Cú Chulainn's battle fury<sup>6</sup> there are various comparisons of his distorted limbs, as in the tuarascbála of hags and ogres. He shakes 'like a rush in a stream', his sinews bulge 'as big as a

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1. TTT 1.4803.
  2. spideóigin, Béal. IV 216, V 12, VIII 202 etc.
  3. EHL p.162 TTT 1.4791.
  4. Ch. VII ex.(7), pp.227-8.
  5. Béal I 310, XXIX 47, XXX 151.
  6. TBC I 1.1651f.



warrior's bare fist' or 'the head of a month-old child', a 'wild heron could not pluck out' the eye sunk into his head, and the sparks from his jaw are 'as big as the skin of a wether'. The jet of blood from his head is ardithir immorro remithir talcithir tresithir sithidir seólchrand prímluingi móri 'as high, then, and as thick, as firm, as strong and as long as the mast of a great chief ship', and makes a black fog 'like the smoke of a royal hall where a king comes to be attended to on a wintry evening'. The description of the fight between the two bulls in Cath Findchorad<sup>1</sup> is also full of comparisons: their eyes redden like flames from resin, their manes become as rough as a sea-strait and the crests on their backs like iron. The blow when their heads meet is as great as the impact of Tonn Chlidhna (one of the 'three waves of Ireland') against a rock.

Metaphorical kennings for the heroes, which appear in roscad greetings between heroes<sup>2</sup>, and in tuarascála<sup>3</sup>, are also used in fighting descriptions, usually of a pair of opponents:<sup>4</sup>

(5)(a) "Is ann sin do éirgedar an dá chairthi gan crithnugadh, agus an dá beithir gan baeglughadh, agus an dá omna gan fheódhughadh, agus an dá lingcne re léirdigail, agus an dá bile buadha buan-lethna barr-thoirthecha, agus an dá eó togacha dighainne adconnacas os fhidhbadhib Érenn. i. Oilill Finn agus Fergus mac Róigh".

"Then rose up the two unshakeable standing-stones, and the two unconquerable bears, and the two imperishable oaks,

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1. para. 4.

2. Ch.V exx.(1),(3), pp.116,117.

3. Ch.VI ex. 2, <sup>p.176</sup>BCC LSS p.7.

4. TBC II CFD 1.3285, C. Cumair para. 15; TB Flidhaise II (CR IV 22), which I quote.

and the two lynxes bent on full vengeance, and the two lasting broad fruitful-crowned trees of virtue, and the two prime abounding yews visible over the woods of Ireland, that is, Oilill the Fair and Fergus mac Roigh".

Kennings for the opponents become a part of most descriptions of single combat; others which frequently occur are 'tidal waves' (tonn rabhartha<sup>1</sup>) and 'pillars of combat' (uaithne áigh<sup>2</sup>). Other animals include dragons<sup>3</sup> and hounds<sup>4</sup>. In Tóraighecht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne<sup>5</sup> a description of a fight (tionsgnamh 'form' ocus tuarasgabháil an chomhraic) describes Diarmaid and his opponent as:

- (b) "Dhá dhamh dhána no dhá tharbh buile no dhá leóghan cuthaigh, no dhá sheabhadh urranta ar bhruach aille".

"Two fierce stags or two furious bulls or two raging lions, or two fearless hawks on the brink of a cliff".

The stags are often damh díleann 'of the flood'. These comparisons appear in oral Irish fighting runs from Kerry<sup>6</sup>:

- (c) "Dheineadar fé chéile mar dhéanfadh dhá tharbh buile, dhá león cuthaigh, agus dhá sheabhadh faille fuaire".

"They made for each other as would two furious bulls, two raging lions, or two hawks of the cold cliff".

1. C. Cumair para. 15.

2. TTT p.75.

3. ELSR para. 99.

4. C. Cumair para. 15.

5. Oss p.94.

6. Béal III 383 = ECRI, Pádraig Ó Gribhthín.

Others<sup>1</sup> add dhá mhuic alla na Fiannaíochta 'two wild pigs from Fenian Lore'. Connemara tellers<sup>2</sup> may have more homely calves, rams, and stirks. This part of the run does not appear in oral tradition in Scotland. The comparisons with various animals seem to have been regular early enough for the two bulls in C. Findchoradh to be compared, rather incongruously, to two rams, dogs, or boars fighting. An obviously humorous extension in Irish oral tradition<sup>3</sup> adds dunghill cocks and butchers' dogs to the traditional bulls and lions. There are also conventional comparisons for the warriors individually. In TEC<sup>4</sup> Laeg taunts Cú Chulainn fighting Fer Diad, and Cú Chulainn threatens Fergus mac Róigh, with an almost identical series of comparisons. The LL list is longer:<sup>5</sup>

- (6) "Rat chúr in cathmílíd fhail itt agid mar chúras ben báid a mac. Rot shnigestar mar shnegair cuip a lundu. Rat melestar mar miles mulend muadbraich. Rat tregdastar mar thregdas fodb omnaid. Rat nascestar mar nasces féith fidu. Ras léic fort feib ras léic séig for mintu."
- "The warrior before you has chastized you as a fond mother chastizes her son. He has belaboured you as flax is belaboured in a pool. He has ground you as a mill grinds malt. He has pierced you as a tool pierces an oak. He has bound you as honeysuckle binds the trees. He has swooped on you as a hawk swoops on little birds."

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1. Béal.V 12, II 125, I 102.

2. Béal.I 293, VI 65.

3. Béal.IV 198.

4. I 3085, 4099; LL 3303, 4787.

5. CFD 3304.



Laeg taunts Cú Chulainn with a similar list in later Ulster cycle tales,<sup>1</sup> and Finn is also described as encircling an army like honeysuckle or a fond mother embracing her son<sup>2</sup>. This series of comparisons may have been borrowed from one tale to another, but Finn's attack on the army is described with further recurrent images: he cuts through them like an ox that has been beaten,<sup>3</sup> or lion whose young have been attacked,<sup>4</sup> or a torrent down the mountain. Most comparisons of one warrior against an army are on the pattern of a fierce animal making havoc among weaker ones<sup>5</sup>: a lion, or bear, among pigs;<sup>6</sup> a whale among fish<sup>7</sup> or leviathan among sea-creatures<sup>8</sup>; an eagle among doves<sup>9</sup>. Oscar in Cath Gabhra fights the Ulstermen:<sup>10</sup>

- (7) ..!amhuil racht loinge lán-mhoire da hanncraibh re glan-  
ghluaiseacht gaoithe lánmhoire, nó leóghan cuthaigh  
tréan-bhuile chum fiaidh, nó seabhac ag léirsgríos  
sgaotha mionnéanlaith, nó madra alta idir tréatha  
caorach".

..!like the rush of a great ship from its anchors with the  
clear motion of a great wind, or a raging strong furious  
lion towards<sup>a</sup> deer, or a hawk at the wholesale destruction  
of<sup>a</sup> drove of little birds, or a wolf among flocks of sheep".

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1. A. Guill and Gairb para. 19; TGG p.52.
  2. A. Fhinn II para. 40.
  3. Also CRR II para. 37.
  4. Both; T.Troí II 1.744.
  5. T. O'Rahilly, Irish Proverbs pp.145-6.
  6. T. Ferbe II 1.734; T.Troí II 1.1473; CMM para. 53.
  7. TDG Oss. p.167; EAD para. 20.
  8. TTT 11.3263,7226.
  9. ELSR para. 113.
  10. p.140.

The frequent comparison to a hawk attacking small birds, which appears in both these examples, and the wolf or dog attacking sheep, are found in both Irish and Scottish oral runs describing a warrior against odds.<sup>1</sup> Some additional images appear in Irish oral tradition: a dog or buzzard attacking hens<sup>2</sup>, or wind blowing through a bag of feathers<sup>3</sup>.

Another series of recurrent comparisons in manuscript tales deals less with the combatants than the actual fight. Some of the images of course are used in both types. The comparisons to a mountain torrent or sea surge used of one warrior<sup>4</sup> are also used for opposing armies<sup>5</sup>. The longest and fullest series of comparisons for a battle is that in Cath Cathardha<sup>6</sup>. Sling-stones fall like a shower of hail<sup>7</sup>. The blows of the weapons are like hammers on an anvil<sup>8</sup> and the puffing and blowing of the warriors like bellows. In other tales this image is used in descriptions of battle fury<sup>9</sup>, and in one the warriors raise dust like the steam from a smithy<sup>10</sup>. In Cath Cathardha the imagery for the sights of battle is very close to that used in

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1. Irish: Béal I 332, XII 87; LSÍC p.223; Scottish: WHT II 228.
  2. Béal VII 200, XV 155.
  3. Béal VI 65.
  4. A. Fhinn II para. 40; C. Findchoradh para. 4.
  5. C. Cumair para. 12; ECRI p.132; BEBD p.109.
  6. 1.5857 f.
  7. feats, ERL 1.4059.
  8. A. Fhinn II para. 40; TTT 1.2059; C. Cumair para. 15; CNC p.84.
  9. ERL 1.4327; C. Gabhra p.146.
  10. CNC p.51.

earlier descriptions of approaching chariots.<sup>1</sup> Clouds of chalk from the shields are like mist lifting on a summer morning, and the flashings of the weapons like lightening.<sup>2</sup> The movements of the weapons are like bees round a hive in summer, a comparison often used of feats.<sup>3</sup> The locks of hair shorn from the warriors are like snowflakes, or the thatch of a royal homestead torn off by the wind; while the blood running through the mailcoats is like water running through a weir of stones.<sup>4</sup> Other battle-descriptions use forest imagery: the warriors are like trees, hewn down after the battle so that only the sturdiest are left standing.<sup>5</sup> Weapon blows are likened to dry trees cracking,<sup>6</sup> or crashing into each other with the wind while the javelins sound like a winter wind among the trees.<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere the warriors are likened to woodcutters.<sup>8</sup>

Another type of description in manuscript tales of the dangers of a battle, or of the great carnage caused, is a series of proverbial phrases expressing impossibility or innumerability.<sup>9</sup>

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1. Ch. IX ex. (2), p.283.
  2. Sparks from the armour rise like meteorites through the mist of chalk CNC p.86; the warrior's eyes are like stars in battle fury descriptions: ERL 1.4328, C. Gabhra p.146.
  3. TBC II CFD 1.3095; Fog.CC para. 35; TTT 1.3166; ERL 11.2819, 4400.
  4. The locks of hair are like leaves blown down, and blood showers like rain, CF p.37.
  5. CF p.38; CRR I para. 34, II para. 29.
  6. A. Fhinn II para. 40.
  7. CRR II para. 35.
  8. TTT 1.2059; ELSR para. 56; TGD GJ p.605.
  9. T. O'Rahilly, *Irish Proverbs* pp.128-33.



The hopelessness of fighting the Fomóiri is expressed in Cath Maige Tuired<sup>1</sup> by:

(8)(a) "Ba béim cinn fri hald, ba láum a net natrach,  
ba h-aigedh gótenid";

"It would be striking one's head against a cliff, a hand into a serpent's nest, the face towards fire."

Other examples have longer series<sup>2</sup>. In the later Tochmarc Étaíne<sup>3</sup> ten such phrases are used of unrequited love, and in Aislinge Meic Conglinne<sup>4</sup> an enormous list illustrates the use of instructing Mac Conglinne about his eating habits. However they are almost always used of battles against hopeless odds, and a later example illustrates the commoner phrases:<sup>5</sup>

(8)(b) "Is snámh i n-aghaidh easa, agus tuargain darach do dhornaibh,  
agus cur ghainimh i ngad, agus lámh a nead naithreacha  
neimhneach nimhe."

"[It is swimming against a waterfall, and battering an oak with fists, and putting sand in a withy, and a hand into a venomous poisonous serpent's nest".

Some of the proverbial phrases for innumerability, such as the stars of heaven and the sand of the shore, appear in the Bible<sup>6</sup> and are familiar in other languages. Many others are found in Gaelic tradition. In Cath Maige Tuired<sup>7</sup> the numbers of rabble killed cannot be told:

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1. (ii) para. 127.
  2. C.Cath 1.4395, 11 useless things; ECRI p.86, 7 useless things.
  3. (ii) II para. 9.
  4. I 71-2, 45 useless things; II p.125, 19 useless things.
  5. TGG p.36.
  6. Genesis XXII 17.
  7. (ii) para. 148.

(8)(c)"co ro hairmither reanda nime ocus gainem maurae ocus loae  
snechtae ocus drucht for faithchi ocus bommadn eghae ocus  
feur fo cossaib greghae ocus groigh meic Lir lá maur-  
ainfini"

"until the stars of heaven and sand of the sea and snow-  
flakes and dew on the green and hailstones and grass under  
the feet of horses and Manannán's horses on a day of great  
storminess are counted."

'The horses of Manannán', the Gaelic sea-god, is a kenning for the  
waves. In Aided Con Culainn<sup>1</sup> Cú Chulainn leaves innumerable  
'half-heads, half-skulls, half-legs and half-arms, and red bones'  
on Mag Muirthemni, and the eight proverbial phrases include:  
dulli for fidbaid ocus budi for Bregmaig 'leaves on the wood and  
buttercups (?) on the plain of Bregia'. Stars, sand, dew and  
leaves are the phrases most frequently used throughout the  
manuscript literature, often referring specifically to severed  
heads and limbs,<sup>2</sup> rather than more generally to numbers of warriors,  
feats, or the slain<sup>3</sup>. One of the few non-military uses of  
proverbial innumerability is in Aislinge Meic Conglinne where the  
phrases refer to fleas in a blanket.<sup>4</sup>

Both types of proverbial phrases occasionally appear in  
tales in oral tradition, for example Ubhall Óir<sup>5</sup>, where on three  
occasions the hero's helpers advise him against the task he is  
bespelled to do:

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1. I, LL 1.13952.

2. TBDD paras. 89,98,102; T.Troí II 1.1158; OCU GJ II 8a.

3. Cog. p.42, ERL p.171; T. B. Flidhaise CR IV 218; ECRI p.190.

4. I p.10. Parody, see p.365 below.

5. Ir. Beal XV 146, 147, 148.

(8)(d)"Níl ann duit ach mar ghainimh i ngad, nó mar shruith i  
n-aghaidh eas, nó mar chomhaireamh réaltogai oidhche rae-  
dhorcha"

"All you can do about that is like sand in a withy, or a  
stream against waterfalls, or counting the stars on a very  
dark night."



CHAPTER IXTravel

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## Travel IX

### (i) Land-travel

Most of the description of travel by land in early tales is connected with the chariot warriors of the Ulster cycle. Description of the approach of chariot generally leads on to description of the people carried in them. One type of introduction is the list of noises made by the chariot in motion, centred around culgaire, compound of an archaic word for chariot: cul.<sup>2</sup> In Tochmarc Emere<sup>1</sup> the noises introduce the description of Cú Chulainn in his chariot:

- (1) "A mbátar na h-ingena i suidiu for forad óenaig in dúine, co cualatar aní 'na ndochum: bosgaire na n-ech, culgaire in charpait, siangal na tét, dresacht na roth, imorráin ind láith gaile, scretgaire na n-arm. 'Feiced oen uaib', ol Emer, 'cid dotaet inar ndochum'.

"While the girls were there on the assembly-bench of the fort they heard something coming towards them, the hoofbeats of the horses, the chariot-noise of the chariot, the whistling of the cords, the squeaking of the wheels, the fury of the warrior, the screeching of the weapons. 'One of you see' said Emer, 'what is coming towards us'.

The other type of description of travel, often introducing description of the passenger, concerns the visual effects caused by the moving chariot. The chariot horses are regularly depicted as throwing up clods, foam and dust, (TBC II 1.587) which are often described with comparisons, as in Aided Guill ocus Gairb<sup>3</sup>:

1. para 11.

2. TBC TB I 1.3574, II 1.4213: the Ulster warriors; TBC II CFD 1.2850: Cú Chulainn; CRR I para. 53, Acall 1.1780 (plus Fr.) no further description.

3. para 32.

- (2) "Lotar rempu. Ba samla fri crích in dá chlod do-ringensat roith iarnaide carpait Con Culaind in lá sin do thaebaib in sliged."

Ba samalta ri h-elta dubén ic snigi dar mag moradbal ina curtís na eich do cheppaib, 7 do chorrfothaib, 7 di fuatnaib talman asa n-aigthib siar sechtair fri fonascad ngaíthe. Bu samalta fri éill ngéise ic snige dar mag moradbal ana curtís rempu d'uanfadaig dar glomraigib a srian. Bu samla ri diaid do rígbuidin in dendgur, 7 ind analfadach, 7 in smutgur ar tressa na h-erma dobert. Laegh mac Rianganbra ar dá n-echaib Conculainn in lá sin."

"They set out. The two ditches the iron wheels of Cú Chulainn's chariot made of the sides of the track that day were like a boundary.

The amount of blocks and pointed clods and posts of the earth the horses threw backwards over from their faces against the tossing of the wind was like a flock of black birds pouring across a great vast plain. The amount of foam they threw forwards over the muzzles of their bridles was like a flock of swans pouring across a great vast plain. The road dust and breath and smoke-dust was like the smoke of a royal hall with the vigour of the driving Laegh son of Rianganbor brought on Cú Chulainn's two horses that day."

The great ditch cut by the chariot wheels also appears in other descriptions<sup>1</sup>. Another recurring motif is that the impact of the chariots' arrival at a dwelling knocks all the

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1. TBC I BMM 1.2299, ACC II para 35.



weapons off their pegs inside<sup>1</sup>.

As can be seen from ex. (1) these descriptions of the approach of chariots quite often involve the watchman device. The strange appearances of clods and foam are often reported by the watchman as fact, and interpreted by the person to whom it is told. An elaborate scene of this type introduces the section Tochim na mBuiden 'The Approach of the Companies' in Táin Bó Cualnge. The herald Mac Roth looks out over the plain of Meath and sees that all the wild animals have come out of the wood into the open<sup>2</sup>. Then he sees mist filling the valleys so that the hillocks are left like islands in a lake. Sparks come out of the mist, and a variegation of all the colours in the world. A great thunder follows, and a wind which nearly tears out his hair or bowls him over. Fergus says that it is the Ulster warriors who have frightened the beasts from the wood. The mist is their breath, the sparks and colours are their eyes. The thunder is the din made by the chariots<sup>3</sup>. The explanation is fuller in TBC II<sup>4</sup>: the mist is warrior-breath and dust, the 'islands' in it are not only hillocks but also the heads of warriors, and 'caverns' in it are their own and their horses' nostrils. 'Linen cloths' or 'falling snow' are explained as the foam from the horses, 'bird flocks' the clods they throw up. Sparks and colours are again the warriors' eyes.

Metaphorical images from the landscape are once used of a huge single warrior<sup>5</sup>. However the whole scene becomes conventional in introducing an approaching army. It is used without the watchman device in the translation tale Cath Cathardha<sup>6</sup>. Metaphor and fact

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1. FB para 44; MU II 1.494; used in TBDD para 55 when the raiders arrive in their ship.
  2. TBC I 1.3555.
  3. See above, ex.(1).
  4. 1.4183f.
  5. TBDD paras 87-8, Mac Cecht.
  6. 1.4920f.

are mixed up, so that it seems that 'birdflocks', together with 'leopards' and 'eagles',<sup>1</sup> are the same as banners. It introduces a new image: oakwoods and sparks are the ranks of spears held aloft, with their flashing blades<sup>2</sup>. A similar scene is introduced into another translation tale, Togail Troí, though this time the strange appearances are of an approaching fleet. Here Priam's watchman describes<sup>3</sup> as seems to him (andar lemsa) a black shadow on the sea, as black as a beetle's back or a whale; a dark mist; a variegation of all the colours of the rainbow all around; green mountains covered in woods; and a huge wind and thunder; as if the caves and cliffs, standing stones and cities of the world were falling. Priam is asked to explain:

- (3) " 'Cid andsain ale?', ar cach. 'Ní anse é', ar Priam. 'Is é in dubfoscud dub dorchaidi dubithir ri drummann daíle no muc mín maethsleman mara atchonnacais, uchta ocus airbrunni na liburni lánlethan lánmór, arna niamdubad di phicc ocus di thuis ocus di resin ...' "

" 'What is that, then?' said everyone. 'Not difficult, indeed', said Priam. The dark black shadow as black as the backs of beetles or a fine soft smooth whale you saw is the bows and prows of the very wide very great galleys, blackened and polished with pitch and incense and resin'..."

The mist is the furious breath of the heroes, the colours on their sails and shields decorating the sides of the ships, the hills and woods are billows covered in prows and masts, and the loud wind and thunder are from the gnashing of the warriors' teeth,

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1. onchona, aquili.

2. 1.4934 f.

3. TTroí I: LL 1.32148 f.

the clashing of the weapons being made ready aboard, and a vast list of noises made by parts of the ship in motion, like the noises made by approaching chariots. The later version contains a list of all the colours of sails and shields<sup>1</sup>.

In native tales the strange appearances always refer to an approaching army, and in two tales the description is cast as a dialogue between two watchers who disagree over the interpretation of what they see. In Mesca Ulad<sup>2</sup> one watching druid sees chariots, the other raths; one white shields, the other white gateposts to the raths; one weapon-points, the other antlers of wild stags; one horses throwing up the clods, the other merely cattle and birds. In Aided Con Ruí<sup>3</sup> Cú Ruí's deceitful wife tries to convince her husband that the armed warriors and horses he sees are merely his people bringing building materials for his fortress, and cattle. The scene in Mesca Ulad contains syllabic verses which elaborate - often ironically - the imagery of the prose descriptions, and some of the lines also appear in ACR. In Mesca Ulad one druid takes up the other's 'birds'<sup>4</sup>: whether they are ravens, corncrakes, starlings, wild geese or herons:

(4) "Masa elta giugrand gur,/masa elta gési gé, /Is fata uadib co nem,/is garit uadib co fér."

"If they are a flock of harsh barnacle geese, or a flock of keen swans, they are a long way from the sky and a short way from the grass! "

The same druid<sup>5</sup>, or in ACR, Cu Ruí, comments on the cattle:

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1. Quoted in Ch. VI, TTroí II 1.836f. (p.137).

2. II 1.356f.

3. para. 6.

4. II 1.468.

5. 1.484.



"Masa cheathra co ndath chethra/nidat alma choelbó,

Atá fer beg beartas faebro/for muin cachá énbó."

"If they are cattle, cattle-coloured, they are not herds of thin cows. There is a little man brandishing weapons on the back of every single cow."

Despite the presence of chariots, the description in these tales clearly dates from a time when riding on horseback had become the norm. The theme of the strange appearances grew up around descriptions of chariot-travel, and is not used in the later literature.

Descriptions of land travel in later tales generally consist of several comparisons of speed, like those appearing in the description of Cú Chulainn's chariot<sup>1</sup>. Six are used together in Acallam na Senórach<sup>2</sup>, where Caelte pursues an enemy:

- (5) "Mar eirb nó mar fainle, nó mar iarainn, nó mar soighid a bogha, nó mar luas menman duine, nó mar sidhi gaethi géri gailbighi doilbthe draídechta a tiim chell muine maighshléibi i lló cruachgaethi erraig".

"Like a hind, or a swallow, or a marten (?), or like an arrow from a bow, or the swiftness of a man's mind, or like a gust of keen stormy enchanted druidic wind round the back of an upland plain on a harsh windy day in spring."

1. Ch. VI a, p. 205.

2. Acall. Fr. 1.6057.

Those most often found together in manuscript tales are the comparisons to swallow, deer and iara<sup>1</sup>, and the spring, often March, wind.<sup>2</sup> The speed of the March wind also appears in oral tradition: Bheireadh e air a ghaoth luath Mhàrt a bha roimhe agus cha bheireadh a ghaoth luath Mhàrt a tha na dheaghaidh air 'He would overtake the swift March wind before him, and the swift March wind behind him would not overtake him'.<sup>3</sup> This expression is generally used of land travel, especially the magic horse of international popular tales, but in Irish tales also appears in the sea-run. A dialogue scene using comparisons appears in Scottish tales associated with the description of sea-travel;<sup>4</sup> the hero asks how fast the ship is travelling, and is told first, as fast as a mountain deer (cho luath ri fiadh an tsléibhe), next that she is overtaking the March wind, as above, the third time that she is as fast as the minds of

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1. Forb. DD paras. 21, 96; ERL pp. 2,7.

2. TGD p.262, BCL p.293.

3. Scottish: Sg.D. p.18; also TGSI XIII 71, WHT II 444; Irish: Béal. I 330, 335, X 15, 19, XXVIII 73.

4. W & S II 350 (AT 650 elaborated); TGSI XLIV 175 (ECG).

wanton women (ri aigne nam ban baoth). The first two times he demands more sail<sup>1</sup>, but the third answer satisfies him at last.

Some conventional description of land travel develops in oral tradition. In Ireland the hero is shown fresh at the beginning of his journey: Thugadh sé an cnoc do léim agus an gleann do choisceim 'He was taking hills at a leap and glens at a step'<sup>2</sup>. In Scotland the travelling run is also an evening run, emphasizing the hero's weariness at the end of the day by the sight of the wild creatures going to rest<sup>3</sup>, and other recurring phrases: Bha e falbh gus an robh dubhadh air a bhonnaibh agus tolladh air a ghruaidhean 'He was travelling till his soles were blackened and his cheeks hollow'.<sup>4</sup> An Irish description of the approach of a giant illustrates his effect on the surroundings: a'cuir íochtar na coille ina h-uachtar, uachtar na coille a'guil i n-íochtar, an crann críona a brise, agus a'crann úr a lúba 'putting the bottom of the wood to the top, and the top of the wood going to the bottom, old trees breaking and young trees bending'<sup>5</sup>.

### Itineraries

A feature of Gaelic narrative throughout the literature, and one probably allied to the interest in topography shown in the dinnshenchus, is the giving of an itinerary of place names for any journey undertaken. Some of these can be very long, for instance the 67 names listed in Slige na Tána 'The Route of the Táin',<sup>6</sup> though strangely enough, fifty-three of the place-names are never mentioned again. The route taken by the poet Néde and his three brothers on

1. And the run is repeated, W & S.

2. Béal IV 214 (Clare).

3. See Ch. VII ex.(c), p. 227.

4. MWHT I 42.

5. Béal XXVIII 71 (Galway).

6. TBC II 1.279.



their return from Scotland is given in Immacallam in dá Thuarad<sup>1</sup>:

- (6) "Do cumlaiset iarum a Purt Ríg dar fairgi co ma gabad i  
rRind Roiss, assaide for Semniu, for Latharnu, for Mag Line,  
for Ollarbai, for Tulaig Roisc, for Ard Slébe, for Craib  
Telcha, for Mag nErcaite, for Banna, iar nUactur, for  
Glendríge, for Tuathaib hUamBresail, for Ard Sailech fris'  
raiter Ard Macha indiu, for Síd-brúig na hEmna."

"They set out then from Port Ríg over the ocean till they  
landed at Rind Roiss, thence over Island-Magee, over Larne,  
over Mag Line, over the Larne water, over Tulach Roisc, over  
Ard Slébe, over Craeb Telcha, (Crewe) over Mag Ercaite, over  
the river Bann, along Uachtar, over Glenree, over the  
districts of the Uí Bresail, over Ard Sailech which is today  
called Armagh, over the otherworld Mound of Emain."

The exact location of many of these names is unclear now,  
but apart from Port Ríg they all seem to be in Ulster. Likewise  
Mac Con Glinne's journey from Roscommon to Cork<sup>2</sup> seems to go  
through actual place names in their natural order. The inclusion  
of the ancient and contemporary names of a place is a common  
practice, reminiscent of dinnshenchus. The itineraries seem to be  
intended as information.

Nevertheless there are examples even in Early Irish where  
the list of placenames is also regarded as ornamental. In Fled  
Bricrend<sup>3</sup> the places visited by Cú Chulainn when driving the Liath  
Macha round Ireland are arranged to alliterate with each other: Brega,  
Midi, Muresc; Murthemni, Macha, Mag Medba; Currech, Cleitech,  
Cerna; Lia, Line, Locharna; Fea, Femen, Fergna ... In later tales,

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1. para. V.

2. Aisl. MC I p.9.

3. para. 32.

for instance, an itinerary of the hunt usually set in Munster is often incorporated in the conventional description of hunting. One of these is preserved in his version of a manuscript romance by the Kerry storyteller Seán Ó Conaill<sup>1</sup>:

- (7) "D'éirig fia rómpa go lua sa lá agus do thug sé a aghaig aníos, agus do leanadar é thrí Chúntae Luimni chun go dtáini'sé go Cíll Áirne. Ghuibh sé ansan anuir thrí Ghleann Chárthaig agus Bealach Oisín, agus anuir thríd a'gCroma-Ghleann mar sin anuir go dtánadar go Beitheachán..."

"That day a deer rose up swiftly before them, and set its face southwards, and they followed it through county Limerick till it came to Killarney. Then it went westwards through Gleann Chárthaig and Bealach Oisín, and westwards through the crooked Glen like that westwards till they came to Beitheachán."<sup>2</sup>

(ii) Sea-Travel

Although the settings of Early Irish tales span both Ireland and Scotland, and the Otherworld which is sometimes reached across the sea, the action is always centred firmly on land. Néde's journey from Skye to Ennain Macha (ex. 6) gives details of his route in Ulster, but the first part is simply denoted by dar fairgi 'across the ocean'. The Immrama however show much more interest in the 'wonders' of the deep<sup>3</sup>, sometimes gained from apocryphal sources. In Tenga Bithnua<sup>4</sup> includes 'sea monsters' (blédmíla), situating some in the sea round Mag Mell, the Gaelic Otherworld<sup>5</sup>; and the Uí Chorra<sup>6</sup> pray for protection from storms and monsters on their voyage.

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1. ECM, LSIC p.208.

2. Others: Béal I 75, 98.

3. Imr. CM para i.

4. Rec. I, Ériu II 96-162, ed. & tr. W. Stokes.

5. Rec II, Celtica IX 1-60 ed. & tr. U. nic Énrí & G. mac Níocaill, para. 42.

6. Imr. C.C. para.41.

The earliest description of a sea-voyage includes both these hazards, when a storm divides the fleet of Conall Cernach, returning from exile in Lewis after Táin Bó Cualnge, into three:<sup>1</sup>

- (8) "Atraacht glassanfadh in mara moradbuil dóib, agus at-raachtatar a roin agus a rossail agus a chorrcind agus a chenandain agus ilriana in mara moradbuil dóibsiu..."

The green tempest of the enormous sea rose against them, and its seals and its seamonsters and pointed-heads and little white-heads and the many waterways of the enormous sea rose against them..."

In the translation tale Togail Troí, of similar date, the building and first voyage of the Argo are described in detail. Her heroic crew push her out to sea and begin to row:<sup>2</sup>

- (9) "Conérracht in muir ard uathmar Ellispontide ina immairib anfoille imarda, agus ina colbaib gorma gléglassa, co ménscailed in fecht aile ina ettrigib anfoilli agus ina h-allaib uathmara imdomni. Corba réill éicni áilli ochorbrecca... for muirgrian in mara."

"The high terrible sea of the Hellespont rose in its great equally-high ridges, and in its dark-blue very-green banks; and gaped the next moment in its great furrows and in its terrible equally-deep precipices, so that the beautiful speckle-sided salmon were visible on the gravel of the sea."

After this they row and sail to land. Short descriptions of sea-travel occur elsewhere in the tale, including another where the sea 'rises'<sup>3</sup> in 'waterfalls' 'foams' and 'gushes'. A similar description appears in Acallam na Senórach,<sup>4</sup> where the waves rise,

1. CRR I para. 10, LL 1.22755.

2. T.Troí I : LL 31012.

3. LL 1.31800.

4. 1.3759.



and the salmon, described with the same alliterating epithets as in Togail Troí, come to the surface. More exotic sea-creatures appear in some of the Early Modern Irish Otherworld-voyage tales: róin ocus lifidhna ocus toilgind ocus muca mara 'seals and leviathians and hole-heads and whales';<sup>1</sup> strange singing birds, salmon, seals and bleidhmhiola<sup>2</sup> (sea-monsters).

In other early Modern Irish tales any journey by sea may provide a place for a description. In Tóraigheacht an Ghiolla Dheacair<sup>3</sup> the Fenian heroes Oscar and Goll set out in a ship for Greece:

- (10) "Ocus tucatar cúl le tír ocus agaid do mhuir, ocus do chiumsaib na bóchna breacuaine is do bhennaib fergacha fiarghruamda fuairfhliucha na fairge. Ocus do ghluaisetar rompa co láidir saothrach siubhalghrod co rabatar ac éistecht re faoidh na muc mara ocus na murdúchan ocus re piastaib ingantacha na h-aibéise, gur ghabatar cuan ocus caladphort i gcríochaib na Gréice glanáilne. Ocus do thairngetar a long i dtír i n-inad nar fhét tonn a tuarcain ná a minroinn ná carraic a combrised."

"And they put stern to land and prow to sea, and to the borders of the speckled bright-green main and to the raging perverse melancholy cold and wet peaks of the ocean. And they moved forward strongly, strenuously, and with swift motion, so that they were listening to the cry of the whales and the mermaids and the wonderful monsters of the abyss, until they found harbour and anchorage in the territories of bright beautiful Greece. And they dragged their ship ashore to

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1. EAC paras 9, 21 - where they are attacked by the hero.  
 2. E. Thaidg p. 344.  
 3. p. 273-4.

a place where wave could not batter or smash it, nor rock break it up."

The first sentence here recurs in late manuscript tales, and in oral tradition,<sup>1</sup> often followed by the use of oars, and the hoisting of the sails: do thógbadar an bréid snasda snáith-righin siúil a mullach a chroinn réidh roireamhair 'they raised the neat tough-threaded sail to the top of its smooth, very-stout mast'<sup>2</sup>. With alliterating epithets this line is also characteristic of late manuscript tales, though, as Bruford has pointed out,<sup>3</sup> in a simpler form it appears as early as TBDD: ro tógabseat iarum na seóla for na crundu<sup>4</sup>. The beaching of the ship is not often described in manuscript tales, but is regular in oral tradition.<sup>5</sup>

Another sea-run in TGD contains another feature of the description which recurs in late manuscript tales (though with earlier antecedents)<sup>6</sup>, the three provisions of the ship: biadh a n-ionad a chaithmhe, arm i n-ionad a dhíbhírce, agus ór a n-ionad a phronta 'food in the place for eating, weapons in the place for throwing, and gold in the place for bestowing'.<sup>7</sup> The ship is rowed out to sea, and the description continues with a storm.

1. T. Shaidhbhe p.26; Sg.R. 11.2300, 3804.

2. TTT 1.1230; also ENC p.157, EAD para 27, Sg.R. 11.2300, 3804.

3. 1966 p.39.

4. para. 53; also Caithr. Congh. p.72, OCT para. 11.

5. Sg.R. 1.2260.

6. T. Troí I 1.30982 LL; OCT para. 11.

7. TGD p.265; also EMM p.58, Sg.R. 11.2300, 3784.

In several early Modern Irish tales the description of the sea voyage is clearly used as a special occasion for display<sup>1</sup>. Some examples extend to several paragraphs, like those in Cath Fimtrágha<sup>2</sup> and Cath Maighe Léana<sup>3</sup>. One long description, titled in the colophon Cobhlach Chloinne Míleadh Espáineadh ar Teachta nÉirinn 'The Fleet of the Children of Míl from Spain arriving in Ireland', is inserted independently in a 15th century manuscript, with the name of its author, Conchubhar Mór mac Cruitin<sup>4</sup>. Along with Cathcharpat Senda<sup>5</sup>, this is one of only two set piece descriptions I know of which appear in manuscripts as individual compositions; and the unique ascription to an ancestor of the 18th century scribal and bardic family, (for whom, the text says, it was one night's work), indicates a special pride.

These long descriptions generally begin, like the shorter versions, with the launching and rowing of the ship out to sea. The part they elaborate is the description of the storm: the roughness of the sea and its effect on the ship and crew, and the sea creatures. The same syntactical pattern is often repeated, sometimes as many as ten times. In TGD the sea 'rises up'<sup>6</sup> as in exx (8) and (9):

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1. Bruford 1966 p.38.

2. ll. 36-78.

3. paras. 32-5; translated by K. Jackson in 'A Celtic Miscellany' (London 1951) pp. 190-2, as 'one of the longest (decorative descriptive passages) in Irish' p.170.

4. Celtica VI 259-61, ed. G. mac Níocaill.

5. See Ch. VI a, p.207.

6. p.265, 8 repeats of pattern.



- (11) "ina cnocaib corracha camthacha cennghruanda,  
 ocus ina bruachaib dorchá duba doscaoilte,  
 ocus ina tonnaib craoislethna cnisghela,  
 ocus ina maíleannaib mongruada mera mí-chéillide..."  
 "in its jagged curving gloomy-headed hills,  
 and in its dark black dishevelled banks,  
 and in its wide-mawed white-skinned waves,  
 and in its red-maned wild senseless humps..."

In other examples the ship sails 'over' the various descriptions of the water: et tair faithchibh fliuchlethna falcc-bhuana falccmhura feargacha fuarchraebhacha na fairrge 'and over the broad wet ever-flooded great flooded angry cold-branching greenswards of the ocean'<sup>1</sup>.

The storm is depicted as straining ship and heroes to the utmost, and the list of individual parts damaged can also be extended:

- (11b) "Co mar fháguib in ghaoth aca clár gan  
 crithnugad ná tairrge gan tégadh ná falann  
 gan fásgad ná reng gan ro-brised..."  
 "So that the wind did not leave them with  
 any board unshaken or nail unheated or  
 prop uncrushed or cord not thoroughly broken..."<sup>2</sup>

Noises from the parts of the ship, the sea, and the sea-beasts are frequently listed:

- (11c) "Conach ccualadar ní ar bioth  
 acht madh nuall mhór mhuichneach mheasgaighthe  
 na murdhúchonn, agus gotha gaibhtheacha gaireachtacha  
 na n-én ccorrach crith-luaimhneach ccoimhghearánach!"

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1. Celtica VI 261, 10th repeat of pattern. Also CML para. 32; TTT 11.206, 3764, 1236; TGD p.265.

2. CML para. 34, eleven repeats; CF 1.59, fifteen repeats.

"So that they heard nothing at all but the great gloomy confused howling of the mermaids, and the terrible laughing cries of the unstable restlessly-moving birds complaining together." <sup>1</sup>

The description of the sea journey is so common in the later manuscript tales that Alan Bruford has been able to compile a summary of its contents in seven sections:<sup>2</sup>(1) provisions, (2) launching, (3) rowing and hoisting of sails, (4) the sea rises in a storm, (5) sea-beasts appear, (6) land is sighted, and (7) the ship is beached. However, all these elements are rarely found in the one run in manuscript. Some are late introductions, but others are as old as the history of the description in manuscript. In the Romantic overseas echtraí the description is used every time there is a journey, and the contents seem to be varied deliberately. There are two different versions of the sea-description in TGD, while other tales vary the alliterative epithets if not the contents<sup>3</sup>. Tóraigheacht Taise Taoibhghile contains eight descriptions of the sea journey.

In other tales multiple description of the sea journey is avoided. Second or subsequent occurrences are signalled by one of the recurring phrases, and then cut short by other formulae: the ship sails on a n-aithghearra gacha h-aibhéise 'the shortest way over each abyss' <sup>4</sup>, or 'no tidings of them, little or much, are

1. TTT 1.1246; CF 1.50; Celtica VI 261.

2. 1966 p.38.

3. EAD paras. 16, 27; TTT 11.206, 1228, 2642, 3066, 3764, 3828, 3855, 5409.

4. OCT para. 32.

told'(ní h-aithristear a bheag ná mhór do sgeultaibh orra) until they reach harbour<sup>1</sup>.

Nevertheless the description of the sea journey is one of the most popular in oral tradition, where it still appears dividing the scenes of long episodic romances<sup>2</sup>. The wording is still closely related to that in the manuscript tales; indeed I have found one oral Irish run, beginning:

- (12) "Do sheóladar rompa i muinninn mara agus mór-fhairrge gur éirigh sé dhóibh na cnuic cuasach cainnteach, agus na morar (?) mí-chialldha mór-thonnach..."

"They sailed forth on the surface of the sea and the great ocean till it rose up against them in its noisy concave hills and its senseless great-waved wilderness..."

which reproduces almost exactly the words of a tale in an 18th century MS<sup>3</sup>. Some oral versions are almost as long as those in manuscript, including most of the elements to be found in the literary versions<sup>4</sup>. However these are not always introduced as in the manuscripts, so that strangely enough it often seems to be the hero who damages his own ship in his haste, or the ship itself which disturbs the ocean and its creatures. Unlike the manuscript tradition, each teller has his own version of the description which he uses in any tale<sup>5</sup>, though occasionally a teller may alternate two versions<sup>6</sup>. The sea journey has established distinctive local

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1. EAD para. 27; ECRI pp.142,162; EMM p.58; EMI pp.80,176.
  2. Scottish: DGP WHT II 224-8, LCC TGS XIV 82-8, five times; Irish: Béal. XIX 109-22, seven times.
  3. Béal IV,97; GJ XIX 102 para. 7, including muinchinn and mothar which I have translated above.
  4. Scottish: Sir Uallaibh O'Conn TGS XIII 70; Irish: Béal. V 4-6, Pádraig Ó Loingsigh.
  5. Duncan MacDonald, Sg.D. pp.27,35; Seán Ó Sé, Béal. I 28, XIX 43.
  6. DGP WHT II 224-8.



ecotypes in both Ireland and Scotland. Many features of the Scottish oral type were already established in the 18th century, since they are quoted in Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's poem Birlinn Chlainne Raghnaill<sup>1</sup>.

The examples given have been chosen for their closeness both to the manuscript and to the oral standard, one from Seán Ó Briain in 20th century Connemara,<sup>2</sup> the other from 19th century Tiree:

- (13) "D'ardaigh sé uirthi suas a cuid seolta móra pócóideacha pacóideacha. Thug sé a tosach go mhuir agus a deire go thír, nach bhfágfat sé téad tíre gan tarraint, maide rámha gan brise, hálamadoir gan robhrise, go ro sglog-sglog ag a bhfaidhlean binn o thosach na luinge go deire na luinge, go ro míoltógaí beaga na faraige thuir is na faraige thiar bhéil-deirig a tíocht ar bhois agus ar bhais a mhaide rámha. Go bhrí an mheasga a bhí sé a bhaint as a bhfaraige gur éirigh sí ina trí tonna tabhail uirthi..."

"He raised up upon her great spotted speckled sails. He put her prow to sea and her stern to land, so he should not leave a mooring-rope unstrained, an oar unbroken or helm unsmashed, till the sweet-voiced gull cried sglog sglog from the prow of the ship to the stern of the ship, till the red-mouthed small creatures of the ocean eastward and westward were coming onto the blades of the oars. Because of the disturbance he was thrashing from the ocean it rose up in three attacking waves against the ship."

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1. Poems of Alexander MacDonald ed. Revs. A. MacDonald (Inverness 1924) pp. 370-400; section xvi, p. 392f.
  2. Béal XXVIII 66.

<sup>1</sup>(14) "Thug iad toiseach ri muir's deireadh ri tìr: thog iad na siùil bhreachdach bhaidealach an aghaidh nan craunnaibh fada fiulangach fiùtha, le soirbheas beag laghach ciùin bheireadh duileach far craobh, seileach far beinn's fraoch òg as a bhun's as a fhreumhaichean, 'cur na faraige fiolcanaich falcanaich an leathair fhinn's an leathair fhaig, 's an fhaochaig bheag chrom chiar bha seachd bliadhna air an aigéal tort chnig chnag air beul mòr's ad air a h-ùrlair. Se bu cheòl's bu chanran doibh, sgiamhal easgan, screadail fìaclan, a' bheist bu mhotha ag ithe na béisd bu lugha's a' bheisd bu lugha 'deanamh mar a dh'fhéudadh i. Ghearradh i an coinlean coirce aig a ro thoiseach le feabhas a stiùir-imiche's dheanadh Fionn mac Cumhaill iùil na toiseach, stiùir na deireadh,'s beirt na buillsgein".

"They put prow to sea and stern to land, They hoisted the speckled battlemented sails against the tall enduring masts, with a pleasant peaceful little breeze that would carry off leaves from the trees, willow from the mountain and young heather from its stalk and roots, throwing the dashing splashing ocean of the white side and the near side; and the little crooked dusky whelk that had been seven years in the abyss going chnig chnag on its big mouth and ad on its surface. This was music and crooning for them, squealing of eels, grating of teeth, the bigger beast eating the smaller beast and the smaller beast doing as it could. She would cut an oat straw with the point of her prow with the excellence of Fionn mac Cumhaill's steering: guidance at her prow, steerage at her stern, and work in her middle."

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1. TGS I XV 52, also in W & S IV 252.

The sentences describing the launching of the ship (rather sporadic in Scotland) and the hoisting of the sails are recognizably those of the manuscript tales. Alliterating epithets in b for the sails appear in late manuscript tales: bócadach báindhearg 'spotted pale-red'<sup>1</sup> the regular adjectives in Kerry.<sup>2</sup> Bocóideach 'with a boss' appears earlier, however, as an epithet of shields<sup>3</sup>, whence it seems to have been transferred to the sailing descriptions. The Scottish epithets breaca baidealach were established in the 18th century, since they occur in Birlinn Chlainne Raghnaill.<sup>4</sup> The epithets of the masts, alliterating on f, are those regular in Scotland; in Ireland regularly comh-fhada comhdhíreach 'equally high equally-straight'<sup>5</sup>. Rowing is rarely mentioned in Scotland,<sup>6</sup> but oars frequently appear in Ireland as a part broken by the storm, or associated with the sea creatures, as here. The list of sea creatures is sometimes much longer, especially in Kerry: lupadáin lapadáin, muranáin maranáin, míolta móra, éisc is róinte, mion-éiscíní na farraige '(????) big beasts, fish and seals, the small fry of the ocean'<sup>7</sup>. The lupadáin are probably derived from the 'leviathans' in manuscript descriptions<sup>8</sup>.

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1. Sg.R. 11. 2300, 3804, 6436, 6884.

2. Béal V 4, XXIX 42.

3. Ch. VIII Arming exx (1), (2); pp. 249, 252.

4. p. 392l.13.

5. Béal I 98, 228 Kerry; VI 117 Connemara, VII 198 Donegal.

6. W&S IV 150.

7. Béal III 384, XIV 249 Clare, III 449 Cárna.

8. A. Bruford 1966 p.206 n.27, see p.293 above.



The manuscript opening of the storm may appear in both Scottish and Irish runs: gun éireadh an fhairge glas 'so that the green ocean would rise up',<sup>1</sup> D'éirigh ina sruitheanna 'It rose up in streams',<sup>2</sup>. The straining of the ship, though commoner in Irish descriptions,<sup>3</sup> especially in Connemara, also occurs in Scotland<sup>4</sup>; usually in the form cha robh crann gun lùbadh na seòl gan réubadh 'there was no mast unbent nor sail untorn',<sup>5</sup> which begins the list of parts damaged in Birlinn Chlainne Raghnaill. (p.398 l.17)

The securing of the boat at the journey's end, though rare in manuscript<sup>6</sup>, is common orally; often as a separate description, either divided from the main run by dialogue, or describing the hero finding the ship. In Scottish versions the boat is still beached:<sup>7</sup>

- (15) "Thachair mo long orm's bha i air a tarruinn a seachd fad féin air fearann tioram traighthe, far nach dubhadh gaoith's nach loisgeadh grian's nach deanadh sgoilearan baile mhòir magaid na fochaid urra."

"I came upon my ship, and she had been pulled up seven times her own length on dry drained ground, where wind would not blacken or sun burn her, and the schoolboys of the town could not mock or scoff at her."

In Irish descriptions the boat is usually moored:<sup>8</sup>

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1. TGSI XIII 70.
  2. Béal XV 145.
  3. Béal IV 329, V 6 Kerry, IV 225 Clare, V 97, XV 145; ZCP XIX 146 Connemara; Béal I 140, 189, 330 Mayo.
  4. W & S II 60, 348; MWHT I 262; TGSI LXIV 175.
  5. WHT I 141.
  6. ex. (10) above; Sg.R. 1.2260.<sup>p.293</sup>
  7. WHT II 224.
  8. Béal I 98, Kerry.

- (16) "Cheangail sé suas 'árthach i n-áit ná raibh tonn d'a luascadh ná gaoth d'a bogadh ná gainnimh a ceanna-chogaint ná éanlaithe an aer ag cac uirthi. Chuir sé dhá théad i muir agus téad i dtír, agus thug sé ceangal láe agus lán-bhlíana uirthi tráth is ná béadh sé uaithe ach uair a' chluig."

"He tied up his vessel in a place where wave would not rock her or wind loosen her or sand mumble at her or the birds of the air drop droppings on her. He put two ropes to sea and one rope to land, and he put a binding of a full year and a day on her though he should be only an hour away from her."

Other elements of the manuscript description have also developed differently in the two countries. In Ireland the ship is often made by magic and kicked out to sea by the hero, who then leaps aboard<sup>1</sup>. Another magical addition appears in Kerry versions of the description, where the sails are described as made of feathers:<sup>2</sup>

- (17) "Ná raibh bun chléite amach ortha ná barr chléite isteach ortha, ach aon chléite amháin druimfhionn donn dearg dheanfadh ceól agus spoirt agus cuileachta do gach aon a bheadh air bórd".

"With no stump of feather outwards on them or tip of feather inwards on them, but for one white-backed brown red feather that would make music, sport and fun for everyone on board".

The same description, apart from the music, is used orally to describe palaces, where the feather thatch has manuscript antecedents.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Béal I 189, X 15.

2. Béal V 4, Pádraig Ó Loingsigh.

3. Ch. VII, p. 25.

The same cheerful music is ascribed to the sea-creatures in sea-voyage descriptions from other parts of Ireland.<sup>1</sup> The exuberant atmosphere is farther increased in Connemara by the eels going arm-in-arm as they celebrate the hero's progress: Le hilebo halabo d'éirigh na h-éasconáí ag dul i n-ascalláí a chéile, go raibh ceól sídhe agus siamsa ag iasg na faraige agus ag éanlaith an aeir go h-uile le neart 'joy' agus pléisiúr '... the eels rose up to take each other's arms, so that all the fish of the ocean and birds of the air made fairy music and sport with the strength of joy and pleasure'.<sup>2</sup>

All this is very different from the grim Scottish treatment of the same material, where the animal's cries, as in some manuscript tales, are far from pleasant. The ironic 'lullaby'<sup>3</sup> already occurs in one manuscript tale:<sup>4</sup> Ba cheól codalta agus ba mhochchorrugud maidne d'Fionn agus dá mhuintir beith ac éistecht re coicetal na mara mongruaide, 'Listening to the chorus of the red-maned sea was a song for sleeping and early-rising in the morning for Fionn and his men'. The other piece of irony, the breeze which is really a howling gale, seems to be a Scottish oral development.<sup>5</sup> It sometimes replaces, sometimes stands beside, the manuscript rising of the ocean.

Different descriptions of the water have developed in Ireland and Scotland. In Ireland the seabed is disturbed: Chuiridís grean na faraige i n-uachtar agus cubhar na faraige i n-íochtar,

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1. Béal IV 225 Clare, II 297 Connemara.

2. ZCP XIX 146.

3. W & S III 348.

4. TGD p.265.

5. TGS I XIII 70, WHT II 472, TGS I XXV 202.



'They drove the ocean gravel to the surface and the ocean foam to the bottom'<sup>1</sup>. This description has manuscript antecedents, whether in early descriptions of fighting in water<sup>2</sup>, or in later sea-descriptions: tócaibther in grian ocus in gainim a h-íhtar in mara 'the gravel and the sand are raised from the bottom of the sea'<sup>3</sup>. In Scotland stones and shellfish are brought to the surface in Birlinn Chlainne Raghnaill<sup>4</sup>, probably the antecedent of the description of the periwinckle in oral Scottish tradition.

Another expression found in Irish oral descriptions (rarely in Kerry) is the ploughing of the sea: a'treabhadh na faraiqe móire fulcanta falcanta, fial falcanta, fial fairsing domhan, nar treabhadh agus nach dtreabhfar arís go brách 'ploughing the great dashing splashing generously splashing generous wide deep ocean, that was not ploughed and will not be ploughed again till doom'<sup>5</sup>. It also has manuscript antecedents: in tír nach treabhthar 'the land unploughed'<sup>6</sup>. In Scotland the sea is given colours: a'caitheamh na fairge fiolcanaich folcanach leobharghuirm leabhar-uaine's leabhar-dheirge Lochlannaich 'going through the dashing splashing light-blue light-green light-red Scandinavian ocean'<sup>7</sup>. Red and blue are the commonest colours<sup>8</sup>, and may derive from the loose

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1. Béal III 395.

2. A. Fergusa meic Róich para. 2; A. Fergusa meic Léide II p.251.

3. Imth. Aen. 1.245; also CML para 34, EGF p.24 - as in oral tradition.

4. p. 396 l.13.

5. Béal VI 117, Connemara.

6. OCT para. 11; ECRI p.56.

7. W & S II 58.

8. W & S II 348; TGS I XIII 70, LXIV 175.

use of alliterative colour adjectives in some manuscript descriptions: tiughruadh, taobhghorm 'thick and red' 'blue-sided'.<sup>1</sup> The epithet Lochlannach is regular in Scotland. A. Bruford has one example of the colours from Ireland<sup>2</sup>. The epithets for the sea alliterating on f, apparently derived from folcadh 'washing', appear in some late manuscript versions and are regular in both Ireland and Scotland.

The usual description in Scotland ends with the hypothesis that the prow could split an oat straw, apparently adapted from the motif of the sword which can cut a hair against a stream.<sup>3</sup> In this use it appears only in Scotland.

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1. Of waves, ECRI p.80.

2. 1966 p.208 n.61.

3. In descriptions: FB §91; TBDD §§128, 137; ENC p.30.

## The Development of Descriptions.    X

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The Development of Descriptions X

The history of set-piece descriptive passages in Gaelic narrative literature can be seen from the following table. The form and content of the roscad chariot description<sup>1</sup> shows that it probably derives from prehistoric oral tradition. Descriptive passages derived in part from those of later manuscript tales appear in modern Irish and Scottish oral tradition, where each teller knows his own versions of the passages which he inserts into any suitable tale.

The style of early descriptions

The early prose descriptions of people<sup>2</sup> and halls<sup>3</sup> seem to be as much informative as decorative. The sentences are short and there is little stylistic ornament. However these descriptions are also highly traditional. Some phrases have clearly become formulaic and are maintained, often helped by internal alliteration, long after their precise meaning had been forgotten. Detailed description of the hall was abandoned after the Middle Irish period, but descriptions of people continue to be used throughout the manuscript tales. The clothing described gradually changes in accordance with contemporary fashion, but, for instance, the weapons described remain the same throughout, even in the description of arming which supersedes the static description of the warrior in popularity in late manuscript tales, and is the only type of description of people to appear in modern oral tradition.

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1. Ch. VI ex (5), p. 169.

2. Ch. VI exx (1) (2) (3) (8), pp. 145, 146, 147, 178.

3. Ch. VII ex (1), p. 212.

		Old Irish	Middle Irish	E. Mod Irish	Late MSS i.e. <u>EGF</u> SgR	Oral Irish	Oral Scottish
VI	T. Man	XP/R	XP	XP/V	-	-	-
	T. Man + Retinue	XP	XP	-	-	-	-
	T. Women	XP/R	XP	XP	-	-	-
	T. Retainers	XP	XP	XP	-	-	-
	T. Cú Chulainn in chariot	XR*	XP	XP	-	-	XV?*
	T. Ogres	XP	XP	XP	XP	X(IPT)	X(IPT)
	T. Hags	XP	XP	XP	XP	XP	XP
VII	T. Hall	XP	XV	-	-	X	X
	King and Land	XP	XP	XP	-	-	-
	Otherworld	XV	XV	XP	-	-	-
	Burial	XP*	XP*	XP*	-	-	-
	Evening	-	X	-	-	XP	XP
	Morning	-	-	XP	-	-	-
	Feast	-	XP	XP	XP	XP*	XP
	Music	-	-	XP	-	-	XP*
	Hunt	-	-	XP	XP	XP	-
	Welcome	-	-	-	XP*	XP*	-
	Arming		XP	XP		XP*	XP*
	Distorting	XP	XP	XP	-	-	-
	Challenge	-	-	X	XP*	XP*	XP*
	Battle	XP	XP	XP	XP	-	-
VIII	Single Combat	-	XP	XP	XP	XP*	XP*
	Carnage	XP*	XP*	XP	X	X	X
IX	Chariot Travel	XP*	XP	-	-	-	-
	Land Travel	X	X	X	XP	XP	XP
	Itinerary	XP	XP	XP	XP	XP	-
	Sea Travel	-	XP	XP	XP	XP*	XP*
	Beaching	-	-	X	X	XP*	XP*
XI	Storyteller	-	-	-	-	XP	-
	Useless Gifts	-	-	-	-	XP*	XP*
IV	Bespelling	-	-	-	-	XP	XP*
	T. Heaven (in Saints' Lives)	-	XP	-	-	-	-
	T. Hell (in Saints' Lives)	-	XR	XP	-	-	-
X	List	XP	XP	XP	XP	XP	-
	Genealogy	-	XP	XP	-	-	-

- T : Tuarascbháil
- P : Prose
- V : Syllabic Verse
- R : Roscad
- IPT : International Popular Tale
- : Formulaic Wording



Beside the 'informative' prose tradition of early descriptions of people there was the alternative tradition of description in stressed verse.<sup>1</sup> These must have always been 'decorative' descriptions: as well as the metric features of style, alliteration and rhythm, verse in the Gaelic tradition seems always to have been sung. Roscad descriptions tended to use short sentences as in prose (usually one sentence is one line) with the same syntax in successive lines (usually a noun followed by two alliterating epithets). There has clearly been mutual influence between early descriptions in prose and in roscad, and verbless descriptive sentences of a noun plus alliterating epithets also appear in prose.

In extant manuscript tales there are also instances of descriptions of people, halls, and the native Otherworld in syllabic verse. This cannot be a prehistoric tradition, since syllabic verse seems to have been first cultivated by the monks of the Gaelic monasteries. They seem to have been interested in the happy Otherworld<sup>as</sup> analogous to the Christian vision of Paradise, but descriptions of people in syllabic verse versify the traditional language used in the prose, and the possibility of choice between descriptions in prose or syllabic verse may be based on the alternation of prose and roscad in earlier tradition.

In later tales the language of the prose descriptions becomes much more elaborate, and itself cultivates the ornaments of alliteration and rhythm. This more elaborate style appears in almost all examples of the later 'action' descriptions, notably arming, fighting, and travel by sea.

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1. roscad, Ch. VI ex (5) p.169, Ch. V ex.(5) p.119.

### The style of the later Prose Descriptions

In the series of descriptions of warriors in the Middle Irish versions of Táin Bó Cualnge and Mesca Ulad in the Book of Leinster,<sup>1</sup> one or two alliterative epithets are added to each noun; and in early Modern Irish the regular number of alliterative epithets is two or three per noun<sup>2</sup>, and may be even more<sup>3</sup>.

Sometimes the number of adjectives qualifying one noun becomes so extended as to form an adjectival chain: a girl and her ionar<sup>4</sup>, an army's swords<sup>5</sup>, a mailcoat<sup>6</sup>, a fight<sup>7</sup>. There are some examples of this even in Scottish oral tradition, in descriptive passages: of a horse<sup>8</sup> or a coat of mail<sup>9</sup>.

Descriptions consisting entirely of adjectives occur early of horses<sup>10</sup>, and of the two bulls of Táin Bó Cualnge<sup>11</sup>. The same form is later used of people: of Caesar<sup>12</sup> and Megara<sup>13</sup>. An

1. TBC II 1.4921, MU II 1.526.
2. Ch. VI exx (9) (12) people; VII ex (22) hunting; VIII (a) exx (1) (2) arming, (b) ex (2) a, b, c, d, e fighting; IX (ii) ex. (11) a, c sea journey: pp. 181, 184; 242; 248, 252; 265 f.; 296.
3. Caithr. Thoir. p. 104, TIT 1.4321: hags; Celtica VI 259 f. sea travel.
4. 23 epithets, alliterating in threes; 17 epithets: C. Cumair para. 8.
5. 20 epithets, alliterating in threes: Cog p. 166.
6. 14 epithets, Caithr. Thoir p. 39.
7. comrac: 27 epithets CF 1.688; 15 epithets ELSR para. 144, alliterating in threes.
8. An Gaidheal IV 146.
9. Ch. VIII (i) ex. (5) Arming, p. 256.
10. T. Étaíne (iii) para. 3, TBDD para. 51 quoted; and drawing the chariot: Ch. VIa pp. 190, 192.
11. Cophar I 1.74, C. Findchorad p. 400.
12. C. Cath 1.346, called tuarascbháil, 27 epithets alliterating in threes.
13. Stair Ercuill 1.509, 22 epithets alliterating in threes.



extraordinary example of this style is the description of a hag in Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh<sup>1</sup>, containing 91 epithets qualifying badb, the first 31 alliterating on g:

- (1) "Go bfacatar ar in áth ar a gcionn badb ghér ghoblom  
gharmanmór ghnúisdub gharbliath ghráinemail ghla<sup>c</sup>gharb  
ghruadchorr ghlenntsúilech ghruaidfliuch ghrennach gherrfoltach  
**ghiunach** ghimach ghoineeh ghuthgarb ghobchruaid ghlífidech  
ghlórach ghailbech gheránach ghruamda ghránda ghrennmailgech  
ghrancach ghoiblech ghebach ghlúncham ghablánach ghedglach  
ghérghlúinech sheirthrech shálcham shiamhsúilech shopach  
shalach shenársaid chennmór chnabgherr chosfada chrúbach  
chrobghér chastsrónach chluaslag chraosdub chlaonbráigdech  
chiabfliuch chretlom chorrguailnech éitchid uathmár fhol-  
uaimnech úrchrom uchtchruaid iscadchaol fholttercainmech  
fhiacalghorm altchorr fholtchríon ingainghér orthruag  
adarcchaol árdronnlam chíchbeg chrapach chasleicnech  
mhérchruaid mhainntfliuch mhuinéltruag bhrachda bhlénlag  
bhronnchrapach chamchaol chrapshliastach dheilech dhornchrom  
dhromailtghér thonnhuar thárnocht throigtharsna shrónghorm  
shremach shruthdérach lomleacachas lurgainbrec luath luaigh-  
illmór lámsaothrach; "

"So that they saw in front of them at the ford a keen bare-  
beaked great weaver's beam-like black-faced rough-grey ugly  
rough-grasping high-cheekboned hollow-eyed wet-cheeked bristly  
short-haired voracious lobsterish injurious rough-voiced hard-  
beaked tormenting noisy peevish complaining gloomy hideous bristly-  
browed disgusting groiny talkative crook-kneed bandy ? sharp-  
kneed heeled crooked-heeled ? -eyed wispy dirty age-old  
large-headed short-lumpy long-legged club-footed sharp-clawed

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1. p.140.



curly-nosed weak-eared black-mawed crook-necked wet-haired  
 bare-framed pointed-shouldered hateful frightful fluttering  
 very-bent hard-breasted narrow-hocked scanty-haired black-  
 toothed peak-jointed grizzle-haired sharp-nailed very-  
 wretched narrow-horned hump-backed small-breasted shrivelled  
 swollen-legged hard-fingered wet-gummed wretched-necked  
 juicy weak-groined lumpy-bellied crooked-narrow lumpy-  
 thighed rod-like bent-fisted knobbly-backboned hollow-  
 surfaced stark-naked crooked-footed dark-blue-nosed rheumy  
 tear-streaming bare-sloping-legged speckle-shanked swift  
 greatly-active laborious-handed crone!

Except in cases like these, the static descriptions continue with one line for each item. However even in early examples decoration of items is often expressed with the preposition co: léine co ndergindliud, gelsciath co tuagmílaib<sup>1</sup>. This syntax is sometimes extended to include parts of the item: dondsciath dondderg dondchorcra co cóicroth óir, co mbil findruini fair 'a dark red-brown brown-purple shield, with five rings of gold, with a rim of white bronze on it'.<sup>2</sup> In another description in TBC I<sup>3</sup> traits of character are also expressed with co, used eight times in the one sentence. The latter part of the description of Fraech's retinue<sup>4</sup> describes the hair, clothes and horns of the horn-players, and the fools' shields in this fashion.

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1. TBC I 3597-8.

2. TBC I 2360, BMM.

3. ll. 3709-14.

4. T.B.Fr. para. 3: p. 151, Ch. VI ex (4); see also Ch. VII ex (1) (Hall), p. 212.

This type of construction, with its possibilities for a longer sentence containing many rhythmical parallel or antithetical phrases, building up to a climax or ending with a cadence, is popular in later descriptions. In TBC II<sup>1</sup> Amairgen, instead of wearing a cloak fastened with a brooch and described in separate sentences, wears a gormanart cael corrtarach co stuagaib fíthi figthi féta findruini, go cnappib dílsi deligthi derggóir 'a narrow fringed dark-blue garment, with goodly plaited intertwined loops of white bronze, with strong splendid buttons of red gold'. In Mesca Ulad<sup>2</sup> an entire description of three doorkeepers consists of triar uathmar allmarda co pudrallaib imgera urarda 'three fearsome foreign men, with very short, very high shaggy heads of hair', continuing 'with dun grey foreign clothes about them, with three copper darts in their left hands, with three iron staffs in their right hands'. Three much longer descriptions of the three divisions of the Dubloinges in Táin Bó Flidhaise II<sup>3</sup> also follow the same pattern, repeated (at least in the first) for shields, cloaks, jackets, shirts (scurd) swords, spears, mailcoats, neckpieces and helmets, each noun followed by three alliterating adjectives. In other descriptions quoted co is used to add abstract qualities and material items to Cú Chulainn's chariot<sup>4</sup>, a hag<sup>5</sup>, and a sword<sup>6</sup>. In the descriptions of Pompey and Caesar arming in Cath Cathardha, this pattern, expanded not only with alliterative epithets but also adverbial phrases attached to each subsidiary

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1. l.4449.

2. II 771-5.

3. CR II 208.

4. The later description: Ch. VIa exx (19) and (20), pp. 196, 198.

5. Ch. VI people (12), p. 185.

6. Arming ex (3), p. 253.



item, is used repeatedly<sup>1</sup>. It seems to be a high Middle Irish characteristic.

In the formulaic roscad description of the chariot, and the formulaic lines on the same pattern which appear in early prose descriptions of people, each item has its own sentence,<sup>and</sup> each part of the description is syntactically parallel. In the prose descriptions each item has a separate sentence; but some have one or more descriptive phrases, while others have none, so that the syntax is no longer parallel, although some of the lines are formulaic. They are also further broken up by comparison, hypotheses,<sup>and</sup> appeals to the audience. However in later prose descriptions parallel syntax is deliberately cultivated again, doubtless for rhythmic purposes. Two of the techniques used in descriptions of people and their accoutrements have been discussed above, but the same style is also found in descriptions of actions. The arming description already has a repeated structure whereby each item is put on over the one before, and individual items can be treated in any of the ways described above, but in the more impressionistic descriptions of fighting and sailing each different section of the run may repeat a different pattern. The style, though not the wording, becomes conventional; though some of the sections have survived with their conventional syntactical pattern to the formulaic runs of modern oral tradition.

The examples of fighting and sailing descriptions illustrate some of the possible patterns: fighting Ch. VIII (2) a (p.265): abstract noun qualified by noun in the genitive plus two epithets,

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1. Caesar's spears 5300 (7 times), his shield 5311 (3 times); Pompey's sword 4686 (5 times), his helmet 4694 (3 times) quivers 5450 (7 times).



all four alliterating; (2b) finite verb with noun subject plus two epithets, all four alliterating; (2c) three alliterating adjectives used as adverbs with co; (2d) noun object plus three epithets, all alliterating; (2e) two alliterating finite verbs and their noun subject; (2f) abstract noun qualified by noun in the genitive and verbal noun plus preposition, all three alliterating; (2g) noun qualified by verbal noun plus preposition, both alliterating (pp. 266-8). Sailing: (9, 11a)<sup>1</sup> prepositional phrase of noun plus two/three epithets, all alliterating; (11b) as fighting (2g) (p. 296). Both of these survive in the sailing run in oral tradition in Ireland and Scotland.

In the sailing description<sup>1</sup> when the ocean rises in, or the ship sails over, watery ridges and banks, hills and humps, these almost synonymous metaphors for waves seem to serve mainly to repeat the structure. In the fighting run<sup>2</sup> the nouns used are synonyms: the heroes offered combat, strife, battle and fight. Four synonyms are again used deliberately to describe a fight in the earliest version of Bruidhen Cheise Chorainn<sup>3</sup>, where the final comrac is described with a chain of ten epithets. The same technique is used in the description of a hag:<sup>4</sup> Finn and his men see an t-arracht ... agus an seirgne ... agus an amaid 'the spectre, and the withered hag, and the sorceress', each noun being followed by four or five alliterative epithets. Other examples can be found in other early Modern Irish tales. The earlier version of this technique seems to use a repeated pronoun, rather than synonymous nouns. In Cathcharpat Semla<sup>5</sup> the Middle Irish form

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1. Ch IX (ii) examples (9) and (11)a, pp. 292, 296.

2. Ch. VIII (b) ex. (2d), p. 267.

3. LSS p. 7.

4. TTT 1.4321 - the same tale from which <sup>the girl, Ch. VI (9) p. 181;</sup> fighting (2d) Ch VIIIb, p. 267; arming Ch VIII a (2); sailing Ch IX (ii) (11c) are taken.  
p. 252 p. 296

5. p. 196.

at iat 'and they' is used four times to break up the adjectival chain describing Cú Chulainn's horses. In Fled Bricrend<sup>1</sup> the description of an ogre<sup>2</sup> begins sé 'he', followed by nine epithets, and twelve more are divided by the pronoun into groups with alliterative and jingling rhyme:

- (2) "Sé tailc talchar tinsensach, sé sotal sucach séitfedach,  
sé rengmar rigtrén rochalma, sé borb brogda bachlachda".  
"He strong, violent, haughty, he arrogant, wanton, puffing,  
he great-loined, strong-forearmed, very valiant, he fierce,  
excessive, churlish".

In his arming run in TBC BMM<sup>3</sup> Laeg's inar is so described, and there are two examples of this style in Aislinge meic Conglinne, in descriptions of the hero<sup>4</sup> and the woman<sup>5</sup>. It appears in Early Modern Irish<sup>6</sup>, though not thereafter.

#### Borrowed Descriptions

This elaboration of the prose descriptions shows the importance they were felt to have as part of the narrative style of the later manuscript<sup>tales</sup><sup>v</sup>. Some specially elaborate examples were even recorded independently<sup>7</sup>. Other redactors borrow descriptions,

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1. para. 37.
  2. Quoted Ch. VI ex (10), p. 182.
  3. I 2191, 3 repeats.
  4. I p. 87, 3 repeats.
  5. I p. 97, 4 repeats.
  6. Stair Ercuill ocus a Bás ed G. Quin ITS XXXVIII (1936), 1.1024, of Hercules, 5 repeats; TTT again, 1.4668, of a lion, 6 repeats.
  7. Cathcharpat Serrda, (Cú Chulainn's chariot); Celtica VI 259f. (the sea voyage - with the name of the supposed author).



or compile longer, more elaborate versions, from those in earlier written texts. This method of adding ornament to the descriptions also indulges the taste for archaism. Even when the source is unknown, sometimes the language of the description is clearly older than that of the text in which it is placed, as in the translated tale Imthechta Aeniasa<sup>1</sup>, and in Early Modern Irish Cath Maighe Léana, where the arming description contains accusatives<sup>2</sup>.

Nevertheless the language of the descriptions is often archaizing. Comparisons with the equative, obsolescent in the 11th century, appear in the additions to the Acallam and in the apparently recently composed description of the three war-engines in TBC Stowe.

Often the source of a borrowed description can be identified from extant texts. A large part of the description of Étaín from Togail Bruidne Da Derga<sup>3</sup> has been borrowed in the later version of Tochmarc Étaíne (ii)<sup>4</sup>. The description of the ugly lad who becomes the 'Spirit of Poetry' in the Prúll article of Cormac's Glossary reappears in the tale of Find's adventure with the spectres of Ibarglend<sup>5</sup>; and the description of Cú Chulainn's distortions, sickled chariot and attack on the Men of Ireland

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1. ITS VI xiv-xv.

2. para. 81, n.

3. paras. 1-2; pp. 147-148, Ch. VI ex (3).

4. para. 3-4.

5. RC XIII 5.



has been borrowed from the TBC section Brislech Maige Muirthemne into the later version of his death tale<sup>1</sup>. The early version of Cath Maighe Rath and the second Cath Maighe Turedh share the same description of a battle<sup>2</sup>, and a list of the Ulsterwomen in one manuscript of Fled Bricrend<sup>3</sup> also appears in Talland Étair<sup>4</sup>. The list of the forces of the men of Ireland in Táin Bó Cualnge<sup>5</sup> is quoted in an even shorter and corrupt form, as a list of the Tuatha Dé Danann, in Cath Fimtrágha<sup>6</sup> and Tóraigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne<sup>7,8</sup>: agus mórán eili ... nach airimhter ann so 'and many others not reckoned here'; agus mórán eile 'and many others'<sup>9</sup>. The madness of Suibhne<sup>10</sup> is repeated in the madness of Bricriu in Táin Bó Flidhaise II<sup>11</sup>. Part of a battle-description from that tale<sup>12</sup> is repeated in Eachtra Chloinne Rígh na hIoruidhe<sup>13</sup>, while the battle description found in only one manuscript<sup>14</sup> is the same as

1. ACC II paras. 34-5, sometimes called Brislech Maige Muirthemne (TBC I 2072 n) from this episode.
2. CMR I pp. 236-8, CMT (ii) para. 132; M. O'Brien Ériu XII 239.
3. para. 28, LU.
4. RC VIII, LL 13425.
5. I 3945, LL 4688. See p. 329 n. 9.
6. 1.357-78.
7. ITS 1.872, Introd. xvii.
8. CF 1.378.
9. TDG 1.888.
10. B. Shuibhne para. 11.
11. CR III 10.
12. CR II 308.
13. pp. 66-7.
14. p. 92 n. 5.

one in Cath Fimtrágha<sup>1</sup>, omitted or abbreviated or found in a different place in the late manuscripts<sup>2</sup>. The part of the sea journey describing the cries of the beasts in Cath Fimtrágha also appears in Tóraigheacht Taise Taoibhghile<sup>3</sup>. The description of the hag quoted from In Cath Cathardha also appears in Tóraigheacht an Chairthe Sgarlóide<sup>4</sup>: cailleach dhochrach dhoidhealbha chaolghrána chruaidhreangach, with the lines describing her middle, and hawk's talons<sup>5</sup>. It seems descriptions in late tales may borrow from those much earlier: the lines tógbháil mhín-mhall mhánla ríoghamhail i n-a mhailghidhibh, tibridhte seirce ina ríoghghruaidhibh ceachtardha in the description of a young warrior in Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil<sup>6</sup> also seem to be derived from the description of Étaín in TBDD, or T. Étaíne (ii) II, in the same manuscript.

Sometimes the several written sources from which a long elaborate description has been compiled can be identified. The very full description of Cú Chulainn in his chariot from Tochmarc Emere<sup>7</sup>, including the roscad description of the chariot, is on a well-known theme; but some of the sections show very close verbal agreement with passages in other tales, all found in LU and in the same scribal hand. The description begins with the conventional chariot noises<sup>8</sup>. A description of the horses follows, first as a pair,<sup>9</sup>

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1. 11.1050-63.

2. 1050 n, Appendix IA p.56.

3. CF 1.50, TTT 1.1246

4. Para. 23.

5. Ch. VI ex (12), p.184.

6. p.4, in Eg. 1782.

7. paras. 11-16.

8. Quoted Land-travel (1), p.282.

9. para. 12.



and then individually<sup>1</sup>; but after dá ech commóra comchrotha 'two equally- large horses, of like form', the epithets are exactly those of Loegaire's horses in Fled Bricrend<sup>2</sup>, while the individual descriptions are from Cú Chulainn's horses in the same tale<sup>3</sup>. The description of the chariot<sup>4</sup> is not identical with any other, but two lines from two versions, spoiling the metrical pattern, show signs of compilation: síthbe find findaírgit co fethain findruine 'a white pole of white silver with a ring of white bronze', cret úrard úraíbind 'sí credae cromglinde 'a very high very beautiful frame, and it of tin, curved and solid'. The description of Cú Chulainn himself<sup>5</sup> apparently combines the descriptions found in Fled Bricrend<sup>6</sup> and in Siaburcharpát<sup>7</sup>. It begins as in FB, with the conventional sentence<sup>8</sup> describing the léine added before the account of the multiple pupils, here reduced to seven, like FB. T. Emere describes Cú Chulainn as breathing sparks, followed by the conventional comparisons of teeth and brows found at the end of the description in Siaburcharpát. The following sentences describing Cú Chulainn's sword and spear are found in Siaburcharpát, but

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1. para. 13.
  2. para. 45, quoted Cú Chulainn (2), from Comluatha (p.190).
  3. paras. 49-50, quoted Cú Chulainn (3), including the account of their progress (p.190).
  4. para. 14.
  5. para. 15.
  6. para. 51.
  7. 1.9264, see Cú Chulainn VIa, pp.198-9.
  8. See People, Ch. VI p.162.



between them is a metric description of two spears not found in these sources. T. Emere also adds rays of love in Cú Chulainn's cheeks. After the description of Cú Chulainn comes the description of the charioteer<sup>1</sup>, and this is taken word for word from Siaburcharpát.

Another example is the three companies of Maine Morgor in Tochmarc Ferbe<sup>2</sup>, of which only part of the description of the second company, and the description of the third, containing Maine himself, survive; the rest being lost together with the opening of the text. However what remains of the second company is clearly related to the retinue of Ochall Oichni in Cophar/in dá Muccida<sup>3</sup>. Both wear white shirts with purple fringes (co n-esnadaib) on their sides. The shields on their backs have engraved insignia (co fethlaib condualaib) and rims (imli) of white bronze: a further phrase co mbilib airgit 'with silver rims' is added in T. Ferbe. Each man carries a spear (moelgae) (two in T. Ferbe) with silver rivets. There are fifty coils (torachta) of refined gold on each spear. (This sentence recurs, see below). The men wear neither shoes nor helmets (assai, celbair:T. Ferbe; iallacraind, cennbair:Cophar). In both texts swords are described between the shields and the spears, but the description is not the same. A line from the retinue of Bodb described in Cophar<sup>4</sup> appears in the description of Maine's company in T. Ferbe<sup>5</sup>: it contained none but the sons of kings and queens.

Maine's company is divided into fifty on red-brown horses and fifty on white red-eared horses. The white red-eared horses

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1. para. 16.

2. II 11.1-53.

3. II 11.137-43.

4. II 98.

5. 1.22.

have had their manes and tails 'dyed in purple', a motif found in the same words in one manuscript of Táin Bó Dartada<sup>1</sup>, in another description of a retinue. The reins have double 'lines', with gold 'bubbles' (bolga) on one line and silver on the other. However after this introduction this part of the description seems to borrow from the retinue of Fraech in Táin Bó Fraích also in LL<sup>2</sup>, though considerably rearranged and expanded. The horses have bridles of gold, and also silver, and the little bells on the peytrel (maelchircul) in T. Ferbe sound 'as sweet as the strings of the mendchrot played by the hands of sages' with the movement of the horses. There is a chariot of white bronze with ribs of gold and silver between each two horses, and the silver threads from the saddles, here sadall, tie them to the chariot-frames (rett), while the clasps 'with wonderful animal terminals' go over the chariot sides.

The chariot warriors are described next, wearing fringed purple cloaks (corcra cortharach) with silver and gold fringes. Otherwise the description of the cloaks is as in T.B.Fr. with decorated corners, here of copper, and animal brooches. The description of the shirts is rather different: lénti srebnaidi sítai co tuagnadmannaib di ór bruthi buide i custul fria ngelchnessaib 'filmy silken shirts with arched fastenings of smelted yellow gold gathered up next their white skins', and the silvern shields (on their backs) have a border of gold (timchell) with a variegation of carbuncle gems and precious stones of every colour .

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1. para. 4, Eg. 1782.

2. T.B.Fr. para. 3, quoted People (4), Ch. VI p. 151.

The spears (dá chaindill gaiscid di slegaib cóicrinnechaib 'two warriors' candles of five pronged spears') in each man's hand bear fifty rivets of white bronze, and fifty of gold, and the following hypothesis also appears in the earlier version of T. Ferbe<sup>1</sup>: if a sack of gold were required from each man the rivets of each man's spear would pay it off. Each spear bears coils of refined gold, but the description of 'points' and 'front-irons' has become 'raised parts (airthócbáil) of carbuncles... with variegation of precious gems'. They shine like sunbeams, as before. The fifty gold-hilted swords have gained hilts of ivory and scabbards on the warriors' belts.

After this comes the line describing the horsewhips from TBFr. followed by the description of Maine himself<sup>2</sup>, a conventional account of physical beauty. After this come the seven hounds, where T. Ferbe adds the musical sound made by the clashing of the silver chains and the golden balls, and the line 'There was no colour that was not on them' refers to the animals. The hornplayers lose their mantles (lenn), but the druids, the description of whose shields is altered, gain speckled cloaks, and the harpers purple ones.

The relationship of these passages in TBFr. and T. Ferbe is further strengthened by the introduction of the watchman device after the description. A watcher sees their approach and announces that since Ailill and Medb (TBFr.) or Conchobar (T. Ferbe II 11.70) came to power, a more beautiful company has never approached the stronghold; and their aristocratic scent is mentioned - in TBFr.

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1. I 1.29.

2. 11.37-44.



like being in a wine vat, in T. Ferbe an apple orchard. In each case the chief warrior is throwing his lance ahead of him as he comes, and his hounds catch it before it reaches the ground; and sixteen people are suffocated in the throng to see the visitors. However all these descriptions of retinues seem to be related in some degree in their present written form - in Cophar both companies consist of chariots and mounted men, and seven score people die just at the sight of such Otherworld splendour<sup>1</sup>, before the company dismount and set their horses loose, as in TBFr. and T. Ferbe.

In Tochmarc Emere and Tochmarc Ferbe the whole description may well have been added at once; there is at any rate no description of Maine in the earlier version of T. Ferbe. However one description of an ogre in Fled Bricrend<sup>2</sup> in LU has been expanded in a later version<sup>3</sup> with sentences clearly drawn from descriptions in other tales. In both versions the description begins Co n-acca in scáilfer mór ina dochum 'He saw a great spectre coming towards him'. Eg. 93, omitting a reference in LU to the ogre's tuaruscáil (see below), continues with nine alliterative epithets from LU, somewhat rearranged. The passage quoted above, ex (2), containing further epithets, is however omitted. The next two lines of the later version, every joint as black as coal, and hair like a wild horse's mane, also occur in Echtra Mhac nEchach of a hag<sup>4</sup>. The ogre's eyes are dark and watery. The descriptions of his teeth, each as big as a fidchell board, occurs of a hag in the verse Dindshenchus of Carn Máil<sup>5</sup>. A ship in full sail could go down his open maw,

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1. II 1.111

2. para. 37, quoted between Ch. X (2) and People (10), pp. 318, 182.

3. Eg. 93, quoted FB p. 44 (15th - 16th century).

4. para. 11

5. Met. Dinds. III p. 138 l. 70

an image which appears in an ogre description in Aided Guill ocus Gairb<sup>1</sup>. Lines about his nose and middle also appear in EME. The hypothesis about scattering salt from Fochond loingse Fergus<sup>2</sup> appears with the epithets from EME in the description of his shins, and four further epithets used of the shins in EME appear two lines later of the ogre's thighs, after a sentence on his calves. Five pairs of alliterating epithets qualifying the giant and his tuarascbail are presumably an expansion of Nirbo segunda a thuarascbail at the beginning of the LU version of the passage. The only other part of that description to appear is an expansion of the sentence on the club, without the comparison to a millshaft. The final sentence, on the ogre's mantle (araít), also appears in the expansion of the description of the hag in Togail Bruidne Da Derga in a later manuscript<sup>3</sup>. It is perhaps worth noting that the line in LU 'about the ogre's senbrisca also occurs of a hag in Cóir Anmann<sup>4</sup>, together with the image of her curach fiacal 'fence of teeth', which also occurs in the description of the hag in the verse version of EME<sup>5</sup>. At any rate this description of an ogre in FB, from teeth to shins, and the line about the club, has itself been borrowed, together with the description from Sanais Cormaic: Prúll, in the tale of Finn and the spectres.<sup>6</sup>

#### Descriptions in Manuscript Tales

Descriptions borrowed and rewritten from earlier tales may add an archaic flavour to manuscript texts, but there is also

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1. para. 9.
  2. Quoted People (11), Ch. VI p.183.
  3. para. 61, Eg.1782.
  4. para. 70.
  5. Ériu IV 100.
  6. RC XIII 5.

evidence in manuscript tales with earlier and later versions that the descriptions may have always had a status independent of particular tales, and been added or subtracted at will, as in tales recited in modern oral tradition. In Táin Bó Cualnge each of the versions that survives complete<sup>1</sup> contains a different selection of descriptive passages. In Recension I the account of Cú Chulainn's Boyhood Deeds includes a description of his distortions with battle fury<sup>2</sup> not in II, which however closes this part of the tale with a description of him restored to his usual beauty.<sup>3</sup> Another description of his battle fury<sup>4</sup> is likewise peculiar to Recension I. In Recension I the arrival of Fergus in a chariot is described both when he comes with Etarcomol<sup>5</sup>, and before the later fight with Fer Diad<sup>6</sup>, but only in the former place in Recension II<sup>7</sup>. In Comrac Fir Diad in Recension I, after the poem Roclúiniur cul charpait 'I hear the noise of a chariot', there follows the description of Cú Chulainn's chariot, horses, himself and his charioteer entitled Tuarascbáil charpait Con Culaind annso<sup>8</sup>. In Recension II a list of chariot-noises<sup>9</sup> precedes this poem, while a different description, of Cú Chulainn's chariot and horses

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1. TBC I, successive modernizations in LL, Stowe.

2. Macgnímartha 1.428.

3. LL 1198-1205, St.

4. Inserted by hand H in LU, TBC I 1651.

5. I 1312.

6. I 2706-20.

7. LL 1595.

8. I 2941-72 YBL, omitted in MS.C.

9. 2850-6.



only, follows the next poem<sup>1</sup>. Two other sections of Recension I also contain passages on the same theme. Brislech Maige Muirthemne<sup>2</sup> follows the description of Cú Chulainn's sickled chariot with an older prose version describing chariot and horses, omitted in Recension II<sup>3</sup>. Tochim na mBuiden in Recension I ends with a roscad description of Cú Chulainn, chariot and horses, in open disagreement with the plot of the tale. This is omitted in Recension II, and replaced by another rosc description, of Cú Chulainn's followers who are lamenting the absence of their wounded lord. There are other differences in the series of descriptions in Tochim na mBuiden. LL omits one of the passages from Recension I<sup>4</sup>, while the Stowe version contains not only it but adds a group of seven other descriptions<sup>5</sup> of people, and one of three war engines<sup>6</sup>. Even when a description remains in the same place the contents may not be the same, as with the descriptions of Cormac Conlonges' three companies at the beginning of Recension I<sup>7</sup>, and of Fedelm the prophets<sup>8</sup>. Only about a third of the list of the names of the Men of Ireland, in threes, appears in the later version<sup>9</sup>. A similar pattern appears between the different manuscripts of later tales, for instance in Eachtra Chloinne Rígh na hIorvaidhe, where a description of a battle and carnage<sup>10</sup> appears in one manu-

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1. 2914-25.
  2. 2279-91.
  3. LL 2295-9.
  4. 3771, the 3 sons of Fiachna.
  5. 4447-567.
  6. 4591-661.
  7. 1.9, TBC II LL 156.
  8. I 29, LL 183.
  9. I 3945-81, LL 4691-703 (without notice of abbreviation).
  10. pp. 92-4.

script only, one manuscript omits a feast-description<sup>1</sup>, and one a description of numberless wounds<sup>2</sup>, while descriptions of the sea journey<sup>3</sup> and a man<sup>4</sup> differ between manuscripts. Of the two manuscripts of Giolla an Fhiugha, one does not contain the opening genealogy, an itinerary, and a feast<sup>5</sup>, while the other indicates abbreviation of the description of the king's reign and an arming run<sup>6</sup>. It adds to the description of a sea journey, while the other adds to the description of a hag<sup>7</sup>, and each manuscript has a different version of one arming description<sup>8</sup>.

Sometimes the manuscript tradition shows descriptions being added to earlier tales; the Book of Lismore adds a description of Conn Cétcathach's good reign (in prose and verse) to the end of Airne Fíngéin, and one manuscript adds an incongruous description of a battle to the very plainly-told tale Cath Airtig<sup>9</sup>. In other cases existing descriptions are expanded in later manuscripts: of a woman in Imram Curaig Ua gCorra<sup>10</sup>, various people in Acallam na Senórach<sup>11</sup>, the hags in Togail Bruidne Da Derga<sup>12</sup> and Bruiden Da Choca<sup>13</sup>.

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1. p.140.
  2. p.190.
  3. pp. 54, 76.
  4. p.84.
  5. pp. 2, 8, EGF.
  6. pp. 4, 40.
  7. pp. 24, 40.
  8. p.32.
  9. A. Fíngéin para. XV, C. Airtig para. 14.
  10. para. 54.
  11. Fr. MS, 11.364, 380, 944.
  12. para. 61, Eg.1782.
  13. para. 33, by the addition of alliterating adjectives.

In some manuscript tales whole sections are filled with the elaborate language of the descriptions. The series of descriptions of people called Tochim, linked by repeated stylized dialogue, are added to in different versions of TBC and TBDD. The section of TBC called Brislech Maige Muirthemne, besides containing the early type of description of a warrior quoted<sup>1</sup>, and a roscad exhortation uttered by him,<sup>2</sup> continues with a description of Laeg and Cú Chulainn arming, Cú Chulainn distorting and leaping into his sickled chariot, the carnage he makes of the enemy, a list of the slain, and a description of his beautiful appearance the next day, all in elaborate 11th century language. These are conventional themes for description, but in later tales the same alliterative, syntactically repetitive and a rhythmic style, spreads to the prose narrative. According to A. Bruford<sup>3</sup>,

'The runs in the romances are not really separate pieces at all. It is often hard to decide where the run ends and the normal process of narration, involving a different degree of the same use of alliterative adjectives, begins again'.

Nevertheless, many of the conventional descriptions popular in the romances, such as battles and sea voyages, can be found in manuscript tales older than this inflation of narrative style, and can be recognized even in the romantic tales by their standard opening phrases: the rushing together of the battle lines, the hoisting of the sails, the putting on of the culaith ghaisce. So

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1. Ch. VI ex (1), p. 145.

2. I only, 1.2117.

3. 1966 p.36.



many of the romantic tales consist of conventional scenes - an opening hunt, followed by the appearance of a hostile supernatural, followed by a fight<sup>1</sup> or a sea-journey in pursuit,<sup>2</sup> that there is very little tale beside the runs. Such episodes and tales seem to have been designed to show off the linguistic skill of the reciter. Given that the formulaic descriptions were already highly-regarded, it seems natural that once such decorative language was no longer dependent on the memory of an oral teller, but could be read from the manuscript, it should spread to parts of the tale previously told in plainer fashion.

#### Descriptions in Oral Tales

Similar shows of decorative language have been attempted by oral tellers in modern Ireland and Scotland. In Ireland in the folk-tale Prionnsa na mBréag<sup>3</sup>, runs describing a sea journey are followed by a challenge and a feast, arming and a feast, arming and a feast, arming and a fight. In one Scottish version of DGP<sup>4</sup> the hermit's tale begins with hunting, finding the beached ship, one sailing run, another sailing run and a feast, and this is repeated with an extra run describing the hero fighting an army, and repeated again with him putting on his battle-dress. One strange tale in Scottish oral tradition, apparently of some manuscript origin since its hero is Sir Uallabh/Falbh ie. Sir

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1. BCC.

2. TGD.

3. Béal I 188-197.

4. Murchadh mac Briain, Donald Shaw WHT II 220-9.

Balbhuaidh = Gawain, in both collected versions consists almost entirely of runs: sailing, feasting, beaching, arming, a challenge and a fight, a challenge, arming and a fight, another fight, a challenge and a fight<sup>1</sup>, bespelling, arming, a sea voyage, arming and a fight<sup>2</sup>.

As has been shown, the runs of oral tradition often derive quite closely from conventional descriptions in manuscript, and the teller can use his versions to show off his command of the literary language and rare words. A teller would use any run that he knew at the appropriate point in any of his tales, if he so wished. Under pressure from the early collectors of oral tales, with their slow methods of manual transcription, tellers often omitted their runs<sup>3</sup>. However they could also repeat them independently of the tale<sup>4</sup>. Unless for some particular tour de force, oral runs, like those in Middle Irish manuscript tales, are usually separated by passages of plain narrative or dialogue.

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1. TGS I XIII 69-75.
  2. An Gaidheal IV 261.
  3. WHT I 21, III 346 n., Donald MacPhie.
  4. WHT II 471, Donald MacPhie.

The runs of oral tradition often derive their wording quite closely from conventional descriptions in manuscript, and frequently preserve obsolete words and forms<sup>1</sup>. Their unintelligibility to the ordinary listener may have made the oral tellers still even more impressive, though sometimes the tellers did not understand their runs themselves. The important thing seems to have been the runs' impressive sound. They were also recited faster than the ordinary narrative<sup>2</sup>, at a speed 'you would have thought beyond the compass of human breath'<sup>3</sup>, enough to make the teller break out in sweat<sup>4</sup>. R. Flower's account<sup>5</sup> of an old man in the Blasket islands shows the distinction between runs and ordinary narration:

"At the end of one of these he would check a moment with triumph in his eye, draw a deep breath, and embark once more on the level course of his recitation."

The structure of oral runs is considerably streamlined from some of their manuscript antecedents. Rhythm and alliteration are important, but a syntactical pattern is rarely repeated for purely aural effect, though, for example, the sea run in Ireland can contain a list of the names of the sea beasts as long as those in the manuscripts. The sentences are broken up into units of manageable length, and the decorations of alliteration, assonance, and even rhyme can give the impression of verse, especially in Scotland, where J. F. Campbell<sup>6</sup> thought these 'measured prose passages' were 'bardic recitations turning into prose'. They are quite

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1. LF p.209.

2. Scotland: LF p.209, Ireland: J. Delargy 1945 p.35.

3. R. Flower, 1947, p.105.

4. FB para. 48 n.

5. op cit.

6. WHT I, Introd. xli-ii.



often printed as verse by editors<sup>1</sup>. The changes have been discussed with examples by A. Bruford<sup>2</sup>, including a detailed analysis of particular Scottish travelling and music runs<sup>3</sup>. Nouns and their epithets are arranged in pairs the same length, preferably with alliteration or rhyme,<sup>4</sup> and extra epithets are dropped; phrases are arranged in pairs, or threes, with a longer third element to give a cadence<sup>5</sup>.

A distinctive feature in oral runs, involving both context and language, is the use of antithesis. The Scottish hag with her breasts thrown over alternate shoulders and her teeth sticking out in different directions<sup>6</sup>, the Irish palace where the feather plumes are outwards and the quills inwards<sup>7</sup>, the Scottish palace that can be seen out of but not into<sup>8</sup>, the Scottish feast where music is taken up and grief set aside<sup>9</sup>; the Irish and Scottish fighting run where hard ground is made soft or vice versa,<sup>10</sup> and in Irish the high ground low and vice versa, and in Scottish the enemy is driven down deepest to his eyes, least to his knees, and friends are far and enemies near; the land travel at evening where the white clouds disappear and the black clouds come;<sup>11</sup>

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1. eg. WHT I 2 90n (ECCR) 'The only authority for writing this as poetry is the rhythm and alliteration of the original.'
  2. 1966 pp. 201-4
  3. WHT I 310: ECCR
  4. Ch. VIII Fighting exx (3) (4); IX sailing exx (13) (14), pp. 269, 270, 299, 300.
  5. CH VIII Arming exx (5) (6); IX ex (14) Scottish sea-breeze, pp. 256, 257, 300.
  6. Ch. VI people (13), p. 186.
  7. Ch. VII (a) Hall, Ch. IX ex (17) also sailing: pp. 215, 303.
  8. Ch. VII Hall (2), p. 216.
  9. Ch. VII Feast (18), p. 239.
  10. Ch. VIII Fighting exx (3) (4), pp. 269, 270.
  11. Ch. VII Nature exx (6) (7) and discussion, pp. 226-8.

the Irish giant who bends the top of the wood to the bottom<sup>1</sup>;  
 the Irish and Scottish sea run where the prow of the ship is put  
 to sea and the stern to land<sup>2</sup>, and in Irish the gravel and foam  
 change places from the bottom to the top. Many of these ideas  
 have manuscript antecedents. There are other antitheses which do  
 not appear in oral tradition, for instance the 'new of every food  
 and old of every drink' in the feasting run, but in general they  
 are especially common in oral runs.

Another feature mainly introduced in oral tradition is the  
 use of onomatopoeia. The noises made by the Irish (*Gonnemara*)  
 seagull and the Scottish sea shell in the sea journey description  
 are regularly mimicked rather than described<sup>3</sup>. The sound of beer kegs  
 being opened is mimicked in a Scottish closing run describing a  
 feast<sup>4</sup>. It is clear the oral tellers knew their runs off by  
 heart, and while the rich language kept their audience enthralled  
 they could be recalling the next part of the tale<sup>5</sup>. A teller  
 might use any run he knew at the appropriate point in any of his  
 tales. In Scotland early collectors of tales found that under  
 the pressure of laborious manual transcription tellers would omit  
 their 'impassioned language'<sup>6</sup>, while Donald MacPhie was also able to  
 give an outline of his version of *EIA* but recite the runs in full<sup>7</sup>.  
 This is the background C. O'Rahilly sees behind the description of

1. Land travel Ch. IX, p.289.
2. Sea, Ch. IX exx (13) (14), pp.299,300.
3. Ch. IX Sailing exx (13) (14), pp.299,300.
4. Feasting Ch. VII (4), p.241.
5. J. Delargy 1945 p.35.
6. WHT I 21.
7. WHT II 471.

Cú Chulainn and his chariot throughout manuscript tales - known by heart to the redactors, who might introduce it whenever they saw fit.<sup>1</sup>

Conventional descriptive passages are characteristic of oral literature in other languages, and some of the Gaelic types, such as arming and the sea voyage, are those found in many countries. These two types make their first appearance in Gaelic manuscript tales with their conventional wording already well established. Presumably prehistoric Gaelic literature had a number of conventional runs like modern oral tradition, even though this is not reflected in the earliest written tales; and descriptions in later manuscript tales are probably derived in some way from oral tradition. Early descriptions of people in prose may have been recast to provide information rather than aural decoration, but the stereotyped phrases they contain need not be new. Descriptions of sea-voyaging and feasts may from their language have been established orally before they were written down at all. Once written, the written version of a run seems to have been felt as the standard, at least for a time; a view clearly held by some modern oral tellers who had heard manuscript tales read.

Runs must have been gradually changed in oral as in manuscript tradition. A. Bruford thinks that some late tales in manuscript may have been written up from oral versions,<sup>2</sup> and some elements of modern oral runs appear in late manuscript tales, such as Eachtra Ghiolla an Fhiugha and those in the Sgéalta Romansuíochta collection. It seems possible to me that occasionally phrases in late manuscript runs may be adapted from, rather than the source of, such phrases in oral tradition. The close similarities between

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1. Cathcharpat Senna, p. 194.

2. 1966 p. 51.



Irish and Scottish oecotypes of runs (some of which can be traced in the same form from tellers 50 years or more apart) indicates that these may well have been established in oral tradition before the cultural area was divided by political difficulties and the plantation of Ulster.

Conventional descriptions do not seem to be the only passages used in different tales for oral display. A very similar pattern of usage appears with lists of names in both manuscript and oral tradition. In oral tradition some further scenes of dialogue, like those of question and identification with the watchman device in the manuscript tochim, are also memorized in a fixed form, the most notable example being the bespelling run, especially popular in Scotland, and quoted in Ch. IV.<sup>1</sup>

#### Lists

I have already considered itineraries of place-names as a type of description of a land-journey. Some other lists of names are rather similar, for instance the plains cleared by Midir in Tochmarc Étaíne<sup>2</sup>, or the rivers which helped Cú Chulainn<sup>3</sup>, or were dried up by magic when Conaire needed a drink<sup>4</sup>. Quite commonly in Early Irish a messenger is instructed to summon a list of chieftains to battle from their dwellings, also named, and the performance may then be described with an itinerary.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Ex. (4)b,c, p. 92.

2. T. Étaíne (i) para. 13.

3. TBC I CFD 1.3147.

4. TBDD paras. 154-5.

5. TBC I 3011 (Tochestol Ulad); CRR I and II, para 7; T. B. Flidhaise II, CR III 126-8 (Also Eriu VIII 137-8, Toichestal Tana Bó Flidhaisi); C. Aenaigh Macha paras. 4-5, itinerary.

Tales quite often include a list of the characters taking part, especially in cycles, where the same names reappear in other stories. There are many lists of warriors of the Finn<sup>1</sup> and Ulster cycles, as in Fled Bricrenn (para. 12) where the Ulaid are gathered for the feast:<sup>2</sup>

- (1) "Batir hé iarom bátar im Chonchobur i n-airinuch in tige,  
i. Fergus mac Róich, Celtchar mac Uthechair, Éogan mac  
Durthacht, ocus dá mac ind rí*g*.i. Fiacha ocus Fiachaig,  
Fergna mac Findchoíme, Fergus mac Léti, Cuscraid Mend  
Macha mac Conchobair, Sencha mac Ailella, trí maic Fiachach.i.  
Rus ocus Dáre ocus Imchad, Muinremur mac Geirrgind, Errge  
Echbél, Amorgene mac Ecit, Mend mac Salchadae, Dubtach Doel  
Ulad, Feradach Find Fectnach, Fedelmí mac Ilairchetaig,  
Furbaide Ferbend, Rochad mac Fathemon, Loegaire Buadach,  
Conall Cernach, Cúculaind, Connad mac Mornai, Erc mac  
Fedelmthe, Illand mac Fergusa, Fintan mac Néill, Ceternd  
mac Fintain, Factna mac Sencada, Conla Saeb, Ailill Míltenga,  
Bricriu fodéin ocus formna láth n-gaili Ulad ar cena ocus a  
maccaem ocus a n-aesa dána".

Later on in the tale there is a list of the Ulster women<sup>3</sup>. Other groups listed are poets<sup>4</sup> and saints<sup>5</sup>. A list of the native gods, the Tuatha Dé Danann (sometimes with the names of the Otherworld mound belonging to each one), appears in various tales from Old to 17th century Irish:<sup>6</sup>

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1. Acall. 6565-96; others C. Gabhra p. 138, TGD p.259, BBA p.336, ECCR p.280; ELSR paras. 2,9; T. Saidhbhe 1.305.
  2. T. Emere paras. 5,91; LgDD 1.25; C. Airtig para. 13; C. Leitreach Ruibe para. 4; BDC para. 26; Caithr Congh. para. II; CMR II 220.
  3. Para. 28.
  4. OCU CR I 12, Tromd. Guaire 1.204.
  5. FDG 1.188.
  6. De Gabáil in tsída ZCP XIX 53f; MU 1.13; Acall. 5115; Altram TDM §2(quoted); CMT (i) para. 48; TGD ITS p.50, Oss p.114; C. Finntrágha 1.317; TGG p.76.

"<sup>7</sup> d'ordaigh Manannán dona mhaithibh a suigeamh  
 isna síthaibh .i. Bodhbh Derg co Síth mBuidhb os Loch nDergirt  
<sup>7</sup> Midhir móruallach gu Síth taebhálainn Truim, <sup>7</sup> Sighmhall  
 sográdhach gu Síth niamhcrothach Neanta, <sup>7</sup> Finnbar Meadha  
 gu Síth maelcnocach Meadha, <sup>7</sup> Tadhg mhór mac Nuadhat gu  
 Sídh Droma Dean, <sup>7</sup> Abhartach mac Illathaigh gu Sídh Barr-  
 álainn Buidhe, <sup>7</sup> Faghartach co Sídh Fírálainn Finnabrach, <sup>7</sup>  
 Ilbreac gu Sídh Aedha Easa Ruaid, <sup>7</sup> Lir mac Luighdeach  
 gu Sídh féruaine Finnachaidh, <sup>7</sup> Derg Diansgothach co Sídh  
 Cleitidh,."

Lists of the names of the slain are common in battle-tales<sup>1</sup>;  
 predictably, in Ulster and Finn cycle tales, the names of nobodies  
 which do not occur anywhere else. In TBC the 150 slain by Cú  
 Chulainn in Breslech Maige Muirthemne are totted up according to  
 their first names - five called Cobthach, six called Daire, seven  
 called Rónán, eight called Cairpre, ten called Feidlimid, and so on.  
 These are the chieftains only - it cannot be told how many of the  
 common people fell, as well as hounds and horses, women and  
 children in his battle fury.

Other lists consist of groups of three with the same name,  
 especially in lists of the Tuatha Dé Danann, where it may reflect  
 the triadic nature of the native Celtic deities,<sup>2</sup> but also in  
 lists of warriors<sup>3</sup> such as that of Ailill and Medb's army in TBC.  
 This list, the counterpart of that of the Ulster warriors, who are  
 named individually, is cut to about half its length in the Book  
 of Leinster version.

1. TBC I BMM 2005; C. Almaine paras. 12, 13; Cog. p.206; EDC  
 para. 28; C. Leireach Ruibhe para. 14; C. Airtig para. 15.
2. CF. 357, TDG (Oss) p.114, CMT (i) para. 48.
3. TBC I 3480-520 Tochostal Fear n-Érend, TBC II 4692-703.



The lists of the heroes of a tale are much more informative. The list summoning the Ulster warriors in TBC gives the names of all their forts, and that in FB quoted above gathers the names of all the most important heroes. The longest list of Finn's men<sup>1</sup> is attributed to Cailte in answer to the question Caidé anmanna na gnáth-Fhéinde? 'What are the names of Finn's regular men?' It gives snippets of information about various characters, including Diarmait ua Duibne and Mac Lugach. The lists of the Ulaid in C. Aenaig Macha and C. Leireach Ruibhe include ancestors and descendants of some of the names, the latter giving quatrains as proof. The list of the slain in Cath Airtig, another Ulster cycle tale, includes the names of the killers as well.<sup>2</sup> Some tales include a list of the names of the battles fought by particular characters or groups, so that one wonders if the lists could have been used partly as an indication of other stories known to the teller.<sup>3</sup>

Some lists appear in more than one tale. A list of the names of Cú Chulainn's battle-feats, not exactly identical, occurs in four Ulster cycle tales, including TBC<sup>4</sup>, the tract about Conchobar,<sup>5</sup> and independently in YBL<sup>6</sup>. Ailill and Medb's seven sons called Maine, with their distinguishing nicknames, are listed in at least

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1. Acall 6565-96.

2. para. 4; para. 4; para. 13.

3. T.B. Flidhaise II, Ériu VIII 136-7; CMR II 210.

4. TBC I 1500, II 1833; FB para. 30; T. Emere para. 78; Siaburcharp LU 1.1287.

5. Scéla Conchobuir Ériu IV, para. 20.

6. Whence edited, with discussion of the other versions, by V. Hull, Journal of Celtic Studies II 43-4.

four tales;<sup>1</sup> in Cath Boinde with their original, different, names as well. The list of the Ulster womenfolk in Fled Bricrend, found however only in one MS<sup>2</sup>, recurs in the later Talland Étaí<sup>3</sup>. The list of the Men of Ireland in TBC<sup>4</sup> is used to make up the list of the Tuatha Dé Danaan in the Early Modern Irish Cath Fimtrágha and Tóraigheacht Diarmada agus Gráinne<sup>5</sup>, probably from memory.

Some of the lists seem clearly related to decorative descriptive passages. The list of Ulster heroes in Fled Bricrend includes all twenty warriors described with tuarascbhála in the descriptive catalogue in TBC called Tochim na mBuiden, plus a few more not attached in tradition with that battle-march. The reference to retainers in FB para. 12 is expanded in many lists where they too are distinguished, usually in groups, and given names, often punning on their profession, as in the descriptive catalogue in TBDD<sup>6</sup>. In an independent list the punning names of the retainers, grouped in threes, follow a description of their Tuatha Dé Danaan masters<sup>7</sup>. In other tales there are whole lists of these fanciful or allegorical names: for cats, in Tromdám Guaire<sup>8</sup>, the 'chieftains

1. TBDD para. 42, T.B.Regamain para. 1, TBC II 148, Cath Boinde (Ériu II 173f) p.184.

2. LU 8405.

3. RC VIII 474 p.56. LL 1.13425.

4. Tochostul FearnÉrend, TBC I 1.3945 n.

5. CF 1.357; TDG (ITS) 1.871. See pp.320,329.

6. Acall.6565, the tract called Airem Muintiri Finn SG I 193. See p.58.

7. Trí Dé Donand, LL 3902-15; also in the 'poetic' tract Dá Ernail Dé na Filideachta, ed. R. Thurneysen (MV) IT II, para. 111.

8. 1.729.

of the Tribes of Food' in Aislinge Meic Conglinne<sup>1</sup>; and for people (men and women) and hounds and pigs in Airecc Menman Uraird meic Coisse<sup>2</sup>.

#### Lists associated with descriptions

The Ulster heroes listed in Fled Bricrend para. 12 are gathered for a feast, as are those in Longes mac nDuil nDiamata, the poets in Oided Chloinne Uisneach, the saints in Fled Dúin na nGéd and Tromdam Guaire, and the Fenians in Bruidhen Bheag na hAlmhan<sup>3</sup>. Many lists in Fenian and other Early Modern Irish tales are associated with hunts<sup>4</sup> as the names of those taking part, and Cath Fimtrágha begins with a list of the forces of the King of the World. The lists of names can often stand as the equivalent of, or alongside a description. The names of the slain can function as a description of carnage, and the list of the names of allies to be gathered is frequently headed tochestol 'gathering', used like a technical term.<sup>5</sup>

The Early Modern Irish list of Tuatha Dé Danann quoted from Altram Tige Dá Medar includes alliterating epithets, and in other manuscript tales names are so arranged to provide a sort of jingling rhyme.<sup>6</sup> Some lists of names are even in verse<sup>7</sup>, while in ECCR the list of Fenians is different in two MSS<sup>8</sup>.

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1. II p.77.

2. Paras. 10, 17, 24; para. 23.

3. LgDD 1.25, OCU Celt Rev I 12, FDG 1.188, Tromd. Guaire 1.124, BBA p.336.

4. TTT 1.89, ECCR p.280, TGD p.259, EAG para. 2.

5. TBC I 3011, 3481; Ériu VIII 138: p.338 n.5, p.340 n.3.

6. The names of the leprechauns, Aided Fergusa meic Léide II 238.

7. T. Emere para. 91, CMR II 220.

8. Both quoted, SG I 280.



Lists of names appear in orally told tales only in Ireland, but there they are definitely treated as any other kind of run. In an oral version of Tóruigheacht Saidhbhe, collected in 1903, a list of the Fenian heroes is repeated three times, once at the beginning of the tale proper (after an introductory run), and twice as the warriors get into a ship, followed by a short version of the sea run.<sup>1</sup> Although the names of the favourite heroes are quite recognizable, the others seem chosen, or arranged, as much for their sound, (ending in an impressive cadence) as their sense. (Fionn) put the pick of the warriors in the ship:<sup>2</sup>

"Bhailigh sé isteach san luing togha na ngaisgidheach,  
Oisgear a's Oisín, Diarmaid Ó Duibhne, Goll mac Moma,  
Conán 'ac Baoisle, Sobhac Conán, Mac Rí Curaidh, Mac  
Rí Bólaidh, Balló Oisín, Bárr Dearg Ifín, Conall Buí  
Ó Braoisleacháin, seacht mic fichead do Chlainn  
Árrachtaigh, Colum mac a' Ghoill, Sgáile Beag Ó Neamh,  
agus Conall Buí Ó Grianmhóir".

A collection of the names of miscellaneous traditional characters with minor variations, was regularly used by Seán Ó Briain in the feasting or wedding run with which he usually ended his tales.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Galway, Béal II 140, 142.

2. p.142 top.

3. LML 36 (Loinnir Mac Leabhair), 119 (EIA), 146 (ECRD); Béal XXX 134 (AT 313), XXVIII 77 (AT 550).

The Composition of Traditional Narrative.    XI

(i) Beginnings and Ends of Tales

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(ii) The Body of the Tales    p.359.

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(1) Beginnings and Ends of Tales

The beginnings of tales are always important, whether in a written text to identify it for reference, or in performance to attract the attention of a prospective audience. The openings of the tales written down in Irish manuscripts seem to be intended for one or other of these functions.

The titles which often occur at the beginning and the end of a written text serve the dual purpose of marking it out from the surrounding material and of identifying its contents, as well as sometimes linking it with a recognized narrative in oral tradition. However quite often written texts give a more explanatory version of the traditional name, including various words for 'cause':

fochonn, fotha, tucait.<sup>1</sup> One of these 'cause' titles, Fochond Loingse Fergus<sup>2</sup>, actually appears in the second list of TBC remscéla<sup>3</sup>. All the titles in this and the LL list<sup>4</sup> are prefixed by do 'concerning', and this usage appears in some of the headings of the written remscéla in LL<sup>5</sup>, where the titles are not also known from the thematic lists<sup>6</sup>.

In some cases the tale proper begins with a question as to what 'caused' the incidents. Thus Aided Aífhir Aífe begins (YBL) Cia fochann ara ro marb Cú Chulainn a mac? Ní hanse 'What is the cause for which Cú Chulainn killed his son? Not difficult';

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1. LU: Tucait Indarba na nDéssi 1.4335 = (?) Tochomlad na nDéssi Lists A, B; Foíha Catha Cruacha 1.3135, Tucait Baile Mongáin 1. 11031.

2. LL 33424: Tochomlad Loingsi Fergus a h-Uítu List A, B ?

3. RC VI 191.

4. LL 32901.

5. LL 32878, 32910, 32930.

6. TBFr, TB Flidhaise.



Cophar in dá Muccida II (Eg. 1782), Ceist, cid dia tá Táin Bó Cuailnge? Ní ansa. Do chuphur in dá muccado. Is de buí Cuphur in dá Mucodo: 'A question, what caused the Cattleraid of Cualnge? Not difficult. The Begetting of the Two Swineherds. The Begetting of the Two Swineherds was from this.' P. mac Cana<sup>1</sup> calls this 'a rhetorical question and answer' used for 'stylistic and dramatic effect', but I am not so sure. Most of these introductions contain titles from the Lists (often used as a heading or colophon as well), and they seem to occur in particular manuscripts<sup>2</sup>, or with particular collections of tales<sup>3</sup>. This question formula is found in late Latin didactic dialogues between master and pupil, and is used regularly in Irish MSS in the setting out of learned material, such as the Latin-influenced grammar Auraicept na nÉices, the prose Dindshenchus and the Cóir Anmann. The story texts with which it is used all seem to be fairly short, more like learned explanations of well-known titles than consciously literary narratives. The question may have been envisaged between professional storyteller and his oral pupil, or a scholar looking up information in a manuscript, but it belongs to manuscript presentation rather than literary style.

Another feature of learned, latinate, presentation in manuscript is the introduction to a text giving the 'four things required of every composition' its place (locc), person (persu), time (amser), and cause. It occurs with only three that might be called tales:, all Old or Middle Irish: Immacallam in dá Thuarad,

1. Ériu XXXIV 107.
2. LL: Aided Cheltchair (List A) Cophar, Lg, (TBC remscéla) Orgain DR (List A,B); YBL: ACR, AAA, Org.DR.
3. Death tales of the Ulster heroes in Edin MS XL: Aided Cheltchair, Aided Cheit, A. Fergus meic Róich, Aided Loegairí Buadaig (List A).

one version of Fallsigud Tána Bó Cualnge, and one version of Aislinge meic Conglinne<sup>1</sup>, where Meyer notes 'This is the stereotyped beginning of introductions to older Irish prose of every kind'.<sup>2</sup> R. Flower<sup>3</sup> calls this formula 'one of the things most certainly non-Irish in the Irish tradition of storytelling', and derives it from Boethius<sup>4</sup>. Its purpose is to establish the credibility of evidence, and in the vernacular texts sometimes specifically to explain how the material came to be written down<sup>5</sup>.

P. mac Cana<sup>6</sup> treats the question and answer introduction as 'in effect syntactically parallel' with another type of opening which I, like him, would think is used for 'stylistic and dramatic effect', the noun-initial opening sentence. Though many early tales begin with an ordinary verb-initial sentence, this pattern becomes increasingly common. In Táin Bó Regamain and Mesca Ulad different manuscripts vary the opening: Robuí dono laech amru la Connachtu/Laech-brugaid amra robí la Connachtaib 'There was a marvellous warrior (- hospitaller) among the Connaughtmen'<sup>7</sup>; Ó do-riachtatar Meic Míled Espáine hÉirind 'When the sons of Míl of Spain reached Ireland'/Rí fíréin foirglidhe ro gabustar flathas ocus forlámhas for Éirinn 'A righteous trustworthy King took sovereignty and sway over Ireland'<sup>8</sup>. Mac Cana quotes early examples

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1. Para. 10; Eg. 1782, Archiv. III<sub>3</sub>; Aisl. MC II p. 3.
  2. See AIL I Senchas Már, Auraicept 1636, 64 etc; Féilire Oenguso ed. W. Stokes, 1905.
  3. Ériu VIII 150-4.
  4. Migne: Patrologia Latina LXIV col. 1221.
  5. Falls TBC, Auraicept 11.64, 1102.
  6. Ériu XXIV 107.
  7. TB Regamain para. 1, Eg 1782 and YBL.
  8. MUII 11, LL and Edin. XL (the first eight lines rewritten).

of the noun-initial opening from Fingal Rónáin, Bórama, Serglige Con Culainn and Aided Chonchobair (D). This begins with the name of the villain, Cet mac Mágach, and the name of a prominent character quite often begins the tale:<sup>1</sup> Táin Bó Fraích: Froech mac Idaith do Chonnachtaib, mac side do Bé Find a sídib, 'Froech son of Idath of the Connaughtmen was a son of Bé Find from the Other-world mounds' (similarly, the related Early Modern Irish tale, Tochmarc Treblainne), Airecc Menman Urard meic Coisse: Aurard mac Coissi aráinic in n-airec menman-so do chinél Eógain, 'Aurard mac Coisse devised this stratagem for the race of Eógan'. In some tales the first mention of the hero's name provides an opportunity to cite his genealogy<sup>2</sup>. In the 15th century Forbais Droma Damhghaire the two warring sides are the first thing mentioned: Dá saorchlaind socheneóil bátar ind Éirinn, as iat luatter o sunn amach, 'Two noble kindreds of goodly race who were in Ireland are followed from here on'.

In later tales this noun-initial opening is further elaborated with alliterating adjectives, as in Immram Churaig Ua gCorra: Flaithbhrughaidh céadach comramach rogeinnedh a ccóigedh caomhálainn Connacht feacht n-aill, 'A princely contentious hundred-hospitaller was born in the fair beautiful province of Connaught at one time'. However, in most early modern Irish tales the initial noun has become conventional, either Rí 'King' (as in Fingal Rónáin, Bórama), Fleadh 'Feast' (in Serglige, Oenach), or Sealg 'Hunt'. The most common of these is Rí, with which most of the wording quoted from

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1. CNC.

2. T.Cruinn ocus Machai; Scél Baili Binnbérlaig RC XIII 220.



Mesca Ulad above is also conventional<sup>1</sup>. Alliterative expansions of this formula are common<sup>2</sup>, and in versions of the romance Tóraigheacht an Chairthe Sgarlóide and the Middle Irish tale Ceisneámh Inge Guill reach a considerable length: TCS para. 1<sup>3</sup>

(1) "Rí reachtmhar ríoghamhail ro-chrodha, foirtíl feidhmláidir fírbheódha fírléigheanta, cosgrach cathbhudhach clann-líonmhar, gan uail gan díomas gan éagcoir ar dhuine lag na láidir, do ghabh ceannas cur agus cumas ar Chríochaibh treabhar-áille Lochlannach.

"A lawgiving kingly very valiant king, mighty, strong in power, truly-active truly-learned, triumphant battle-victorious, with many children, without pride or arrogance or injustice over men weak or strong, took the headship, authority, and control over the fair-titled lands of Lochlann".

In CIG (GGG p.93) the same pattern fills the first thirteen lines, with forty alliterating adjectives following Airdrí, 'A high-king'. The next ten lines further describe the king, all expanded from one sentence in the older version (Rawl. B.512): Rí rogab Muman, edhón Feidlimid mac Crimthainn. TCS, in earlier, 18th century MSS, begins Feacht n-aon, the equivalent of the English 'Once upon a time,' which, with Laa n-aen 'One day', is a popular opening for early modern Irish tales<sup>4</sup>. Nasalization after the accusative (of time), obsolete elsewhere, is regularly preserved in both of these set phrases.<sup>5</sup>

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1. MU II 1, n.; A. Fergus m. Léide II 238; E. Chormaic para. 1; ACT, CF, CMM II, TGD: (rí ... rogab... f - agus f -).
  2. Altram TDM para. 1, ECRI p.50, EMI p.74.
  3. 23 N 13, GJ XIX 106.
  4. T. Étaíne (iii); ACC II, EAC, EMO, TDL, TGG.
  5. SgR 6513, 3300.

The noun-initial beginnings of the Romantic Tales, Rí, Fleadh, or Sealg, generally lead on to a description: fleadh to a feast,<sup>1</sup> sealg to a hunt<sup>2</sup>, rí to the type of praise of the king mentioned above; or the same obliquely, by describing the land in his reign<sup>3</sup>, or sometimes to the description of a feast or hunt which he convenes<sup>4</sup>. The first two of these occur earlier; Tochmarc Emere begins with a description of Conchobor's reign, Fled Bricrend with a description of the feast. Lists and genealogies can be associated with the beginning of a tale, and the common opening motif of the appearance of a supernatural visitor means that many early tales begin with the visitor's tuarascbháil<sup>5</sup>, and others could have done<sup>6</sup>.

However A.Bruford<sup>7</sup> suggests a function in recitation for the typical beginnings of the Romantic tales: the initial monosyllabic noun 'written in capitals in the MS and very likely shouted in performance', followed by a conventional description, serves 'to draw the audience's attention to the fact that the performance was beginning, and then to provide a showy but irrelevant wash of sound while they settled down to listen'. The setting leads directly on to the story.

1. OCU, BBA.
2. BCC, FTC, EAD, DGP, EMM, A.Fhinn II.
3. E. Chormaic, EMI, TGD, ECRI, TTT, C.Cumair, CMR II, CMM II, ERL.
4. Feast CIL 1.1431; hunt TGD p.258.
5. TBDD, T. Étaíne (iii), E Laegaire, T. Ferbe I, T. Becfhola, T B Regamna, A.Muirchertaig.
6. Imr. Brain, Aisl.Oeng, T. Cruinn & Macha.
7. 1969 p.37.

As Bruford also points out<sup>1</sup>, the manuscript opening runs are not very common in modern oral tradition, and the occasional appearance of the 'king' or 'hunt' run in Irish tales is often not at the very beginning. Unlike other oral runs these occur only in survivals, often of particular literary tales.

Many of the shorter opening devices appear in oral as in manuscript tales. Lá n-aon appears in Ireland and Scotland: Lá da raibh Fionn mac Cumhaill<sup>2</sup>; Lá dha'n robh Fionn mac Cumhaill<sup>3</sup>. The regular beginning of Irish tales seems to be Bhí rí fudó ann, 'There was a king long ago';<sup>4</sup> in Scotland Bha ann roimhe seo rígh Éireann, 'Some time ago there was a king of Ireland'<sup>5</sup>. In Ireland however there are some examples of noun-initial sentences,<sup>6</sup> especially common in the tales of the Cárna storytellers Seán Ó Briain and Micheál mac Donnchadha: Triúir mac a bhí ag Rí na hOrbhuaidhe, 'The king of Orbhuaidh had three sons';<sup>7</sup> Rí i n-Éirinn a bhí ann, agus an bhean a bhí aige, cailleadh í, 'There was a king in Ireland whose wife died'.<sup>8</sup>

A distinctive feature of Irish oral tales, however, is the existence of a new opening run (especially in Clare, Galway and Mayo) which a teller can use to introduce any of his repertoire.<sup>9</sup> Such introductory runs appear in other modern European oral traditions, especially in the Slavic languages, where they are

1. 182-3.

2. Cronán mhac Imilit.

3. An Gaidheal IV 10. One day when Fionn mac Cumhaill was ...

4. LSIC p.7 etc.

5. WHT II 470, EIA.

6. Béal I 357, VI 61 ECM, Béal I 309 AT 302.

7. LML p.120, ECRI; also pp.1,90.

8. Béal XV 141, Ubhall Óir; also LML pp.68,147.

9. Béal IV 214, XIV 248 Seán Carún, Clare; Béal III 188, 447, V 92 Eamonn Ó Cuanaigh, Galway; Béal XXVIII 64, XXX 135 Seán Ó Briain.



generally rhythmic in form, humorous in content, and spoken in a 'dashing manner', to attract the attention of the audience<sup>1</sup>. Their content is completely separate from that of the narrative proper. The Irish runs show an unusual interest in the history (emphasizing its age) and transmission and status of the tale, using a triad:<sup>2</sup>

- (2) "Bhí ann fadó agus fadó bhí. Dá mbéinn san uair sin ann ní bhéinn anois ann, nó dá mbéinn anois agus an uair sin ann badhcríon liath an sgéaluidhe me, bhéadh sgéal nua no sean-sgéal agam nó bhéinn gan aon sgéal. Trí bhuadh atá ag sgéaluiagheacht; ní maith léi innseacht gan a h-éisteacht, ní maith léi a h-éisteacht gan a tóigealt. Trí naimhde atá aici, síor-chaint, bró mhuilinn agus ord ceardchan".

"There was once and once there was. If I had been there then I wouldn't be here now, or if I had been there then and now I would be a withered, grey-haired storyteller, I would have a new tale or an old tale or no tale at all. There are three<sup>(1)</sup> virtues of storytelling: it doesn't like to be told without being listened to, and it doesn't like being listened to without being understood. It has three enemies - continual talk, the quern of a mill, and a hammer in a forge."

The first part of this is utterly conventional, though I have found the second part nowhere else. Some tellers elaborate the first part with 'had I been deaf I wouldn't have heard it, had I been dumb I couldn't have told it'<sup>3</sup>; others continue with the wish

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1. Y. Sokolov, 'Russian Folklore', tr. Smith; Pennysylvanian Folklore Associates 1966, p.419 ff, where two examples are quoted.
  2. Béal III 188, Éamonn Ó Cuanaigh 1903, and n.2.
  3. Bruford p.183, Donegal.

that the bearer won't be able to learn the tale as well as the storyteller.

Since the run is not found in Scotland, Bruford suggests it may be a fairly recent development. Although he quotes examples from Donegal, Monaghan, and Waterford there is still no record of it in Kerry. However it is certainly as old as 1830, when it appears in a northern MS as 'the usual commencement of an úrsgéal'.<sup>1</sup> Although differing in theme and content, both from each other and from modern parallels in international popular oral tradition, I think one can agree that the conventional introductions in early modern manuscript tales and in modern Irish oral tradition serve the same purpose, to attract the initial attention of the audience.

#### Endings of Tales

Compared with the beginning the ending of the tale is less marked stylistically, especially in manuscript tales. The narrative is usually brought to an end in prose, followed by the colophon giving the title. There is no conventional wording, except in some of the echtraí and other tales where people go to the Otherworld and never return: ocus ní tháinic as fós 'and he has not come out of it yet';<sup>2</sup> ocus ní fessa a imthechta ond uair sin 'and his doings are not known from that time'.<sup>3</sup>

A few tales, quoted already, have a colophon giving the benefits of recitation of the tale for audience and teller.<sup>4</sup> However much more frequently manuscript tales have a colophon which purports to give the history of the text as presented. The earliest examples are in the Immrama, where survivors tell the story, and it is written down in ogam,<sup>5</sup> or arranged by the chief

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1. Béal IV 208.
  2. E. Laegaire p.386; also E Nerai para. 19, T. Becfhola II p.182.
  3. Imr. Brain para. 66; also T.B.Flidhaise II, CR IV 218, of Flidais and her cow.
  4. TBC II 4916, Aisl.M.C. II 111, Altram TDM para. 12.
  5. Imr. Brain para. 66.

sage (ardecnuid) of Ireland 'to cheer the mind and for the folk of Ireland after him'<sup>1</sup>. The same concern to authenticate the tales of pagan heroes appears in Fallsigud Tána Bó Cualnge, where Fergus is resurrected to tell TBC to Senchán, who writes it down; and Acallam na Senórach, where the Fenian heroes have survived in the Otherworld till the time of St. Patrick, who tells his scribe repeatedly to write their stories down, so that listening to them shall be 'entertainment for crowds and noblemen at the end of time'<sup>2</sup>. In late compositions the authenticating colophon becomes a convention: Cú Chulainn leaves money to the filid to preserve the account of his adventures<sup>3</sup>; clerics write the tale from the telling of contemporaries<sup>4</sup>; or the tale is written by foreign druids<sup>5</sup>, or in the 'Book of India'<sup>6</sup>, or in the 'castle roll' at Emhain Macha<sup>7</sup>.

Even more clearly written developments are the citing of scribal opinions at the ends of tales<sup>8</sup>, or of variant versions, often supported by a quatrain<sup>9</sup>.

Verses are cited as proof, as well as attributed to a character in the story, at the ends of other manuscript tales, and it seems clear in many cases that this was regarded as part of the literary treatment of the narrative. Some tales end with

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1. Imr.CM ch.34.
  2. Acall. 296.
  3. A. Guill & Gairb para. 57.
  4. A. Muirchertaig para. 52.
  5. ECRI p.198 ms F.
  6. EMM p.72.
  7. Sg.R 1.3299.
  8. Serglige CC para. 49, TBC II 1.4921, E. Chormaic para. 80.
  9. T. Étaíne (i) para. 26, CMM I para. 77.



one verse comment<sup>1</sup>, others with several, attributed to various traditional figures: in Bórama spoken by St. Moling and Adamnán; in Scél Baile attributed to Cormac mac Airt, his daughter Ailbhe, and the fili Fland mac Lonáin.<sup>2</sup> Others end with a single, longer poem. The later version of Táin Bó Flidhaise ends with a long poem recounting the events of the tale<sup>3</sup>. In the later Tochmarc Ferbe a poem of 39 quatrains (Aislinge Conchobuir Chóir) is commissioned by Conchobar from his fili Ferchertne to commemorate the story: do chumnigud in sceóil sin<sup>4</sup>.

Poems uttered by one of the characters are frequently used as the ending of a tale. In Cath Maige Tuired the wargoddess Bodb concludes with a roscad foretelling the end of the world.<sup>5</sup> Some manuscripts of Tóraigheacht Dhiarmada agus Gráinne<sup>6</sup> end with a poem by Gráinne urging her sons to revenge, and the later version of Aided Con Culainn<sup>7</sup> ends with Conall Cernach's verse account of the heads of Cú Chulainn's enemies he has brought as trophies to Emer, often extant independently as Laoidh na gCeann 'The Lay of the Heads'. Many tales end with a verse degy on one of the characters<sup>8</sup>.

Runs are less common as endings, but they do occur, most often the short burial formula which appears at the end of many aideda<sup>9</sup>.

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1. A. Dhiarmada p.82, A. Fergusa m. Léiti I para. 9, C. Aenaig Macha para. 8, EME para. 19.
  2. Bórama para. 162 (Lecan only); Scél Baile RC XIII 220 ll.58-75.
  3. T. B. Flidhaise II, CR IV 214.
  4. T. Ferbe II ll.766-933.
  5. CMT (ii) para. 166.
  6. TDG ITS p.102, 5 quatrains.
  7. II para. 58.
  8. CMR I ll.201-46, 11½ quatrains; CRR I para. 57, II para. 46, 3 quatrains; Altram TDM para. 12, 13 quatrains - repeats preceding prose.
  9. AAA para. 13, A. Cheltchair para. 12, A. Fergusa m. Léide II 252.

Other descriptions at the end of manuscript tales seem most often to be additions; the almost metric description of the bulls at the end of Cophar in dá Muccida<sup>1</sup>; the prose, and corroborative (amál asbert Eochaid Écius) verse, description of Conn Cédchathach's good reign added at the end of Airne Fíngéin<sup>2</sup>.

Oral versions of manuscript tales, as well as international tales told in Scotland and Ireland, frequently end with a description of a feast, often for a wedding, the traditional happy ending of folk tales in many countries<sup>3</sup>. The feast may last a long, long time or be continuing still. Seán Ó Briain's version of the closing feast consisted mainly of a list of the names of the guests, among which he might include himself and acquaintances<sup>4</sup>. As in other oral traditions the teller often implies he was an eyewitness: a common Scottish Gaelic ending to the tale is agus dhealaich mise riutha 'and I parted from them'.<sup>5</sup>

However, as well as being a grand finale to the events of the tale, the closing run often has a different function, to bring the audience back to earth by a piece of humorous bathos. In Irish tales, rather than leave the characters to live happy ever after, the teller often explains his return: Chuadar sin an t-átha, agus mise an clochán. Baithadh iadsan agus tháinig mise 'They went by the ford, and I by the stepping-stones. They were drowned and I got through'<sup>6</sup>. In Breton feasting end-runs<sup>7</sup>, a kick from the cook sends the teller home to tell the story; in Hungarian

1. I 1.74.

2. para. XV.

3. Ch. VII (d) Feasting ex (21), p.241.

4. Béal XXX 134.

5. SgD 44, 58.

6. Seán Ó Briain, Béal XXX 134, Béal I 296.

7. RC V 339-41.

tales the teller dancing at the feast pierces with his spurs a sack in which rivers are contained 'and the flood carried me all the way here'<sup>1</sup>. A further humorous touch, also international, are the 'useless gifts' the teller says he was given at the feast. In Russian closing feasts the abundant drink merely ran down the teller's moustache and never entered his mouth;<sup>2</sup> he is given a robe and slippers or a cap, but throws them away when he misinterprets the cries of birds. In one of these<sup>3</sup>, and Hungarian tales<sup>4</sup>, he is given a horse, made of ice or wax and other incongruous things, which melts beneath him. In Irish tales the gifts are paper shoes and sour milk stockings.<sup>5</sup> In Scottish tales the formula of the useless gifts is less common<sup>6</sup>, but develops into a rhyme in a manner unknown in Ireland<sup>7</sup>:

- (3) "Cha d'fhuair mise an sìod  
Ach crioman ime air éibhleig,  
'S deur bainne an cròileig,  
'S deoch an cupan gun tònn  
'S an crioman arain nach robh ann,  
'S fhuair mi cead dol dachaidh!"

"I got nothing there but a little bite of butter on an ember,  
a drop of milk in a creel, a drink in a cup with no bottom and a  
little bite of bread that wasn't there, and I was allowed home".

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1. Hungarian Folktales ed. G. Ortutay, Budapest 1962 pp. 169, 227, 304.
  2. Russian Fairy Tales tr. Gutermann from Afanasyev, esp. pp. 46, 144, 414.
  3. p. 414.
  4. op. cit. pp. 321, 328.
  5. Béal XXX 134, IV 341, VI 116, II 134.
  6. An Gaidheal IV 81, 303; MWHI I 46, 60, 406, 430; W & S III 16, 186, 257.
  7. MWHI II 298, see n. 2.

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(11) The Body of the Tales

The use of runs in both oral and manuscript tradition to begin a tale, and the occurrence of the same narrative elements - simple prose, dialogue in direct speech, and the rich rhythmic alliterative prose of the runs - both in early manuscript and modern oral tales, suggest how modern oral tradition may be used to reflect back on the actual performance of the tales in manuscript. Though the early tales are said to have been the prerogative of the aristocratic and professionally learned filid, and the modern oral tales were told by peasant farmers, largely self-taught, however learned, the impressive continuity of tale-plots and constituent elements of style suggests that the modern oral tellers may also have preserved the traditional manner of narration. As in prehistoric Gaelic society, their learning depends entirely on oral transmission.

The prose narrative of oral tradition is generally fairly plain, and told by good tellers in a steady, emphatic though not rhetorical manner, in contrast to the rapid rhythmic chant of the runs.

The narrative of the earliest written tales would probably be too concise for oral delivery. Though some of the short Old Irish tales would not have been too long to sustain the attention of an audience when told as anecdotes, it is doubtful whether a listed filí tale would really have been told to the aristocracy in so brief and plain a form. However a similar brevity and terseness appears in the snatches of dialogue always given in direct speech throughout the tradition. The language of conversation in tales always seems to be deliberately realistic, and it was probably the language of ordinary speech that was adapted by the monastic redactors of tales, who may not have known

the language used by the aristocratic professional tellers of their time for oral embellishment. Characterization seems always to have been illustrated through the dialogue.

In the early tradition any important utterance, of passion or prophecy, seems to have been cast in more elaborate language, either alliterative retoiric with irregular rhythm in early tales (possibly already fixed in wording in oral tradition and learnt by successive tellers) or, regularly throughout the manuscript literature, in regular verse. The early stressed metre or roscad, of which some texts may also have been orally maintained, gradually gives way to the later syllabic metres, except in poems of exhortation or prophecy. Retoiric, which has usually been transmitted in corrupt form, seems to have been composed in deliberately difficult and archaic language, while in the verse it is largely the form which distinguishes it from the prose. However verse would also have been sung, and presumably roscad and syllabic metre would have different types of tune, as in the dán díreach and amhrán of modern times. Verses seem to be part of the professional learned cultivation of the tales. Apart from those which become established by tradition and usage, syllabic verses seem to be added to tales as decoration by redactors. This practice must have begun in the monasteries, where syllabic verse first ousted roscad, and poems describing the Otherworld were added to decorate the pagan Echtraí. Verses quoted as proof seem to be added rather to the written text. However tales were sometimes simplified later by the omission of retoiric in Middle Irish, roscad in Early Modern Irish, and even syllabic poems in some later tales. Only a few verses of syllabic verse are preserved in modern oral tales.

Formulaic wording only appears sporadically in the conventional descriptions in early (usually Middle Irish) manuscript tales. However the formulaic wording of the roscad chariot descriptions shows that in early oral tradition the descriptions probably were formulaic passages recited as fixed texts, as in modern Ireland and Scotland. The early written tuarascbála use rare terms for the equipment of people and halls, and unusual language seems to have been a characteristic feature of the descriptions throughout the tradition. As with the heightened language of speeches, conventional descriptions use much alliteration and rhythm. Some examples are in regular metre, fitted into the convention of verse speeches by the watchman device, but in others the repetition of the same syntax and regular rhythm also gives the impression of verse. This would be a natural result in manuscript as in oral tradition if the descriptions were recited in a rhythmic chant. (I am grateful to the Department of Folklore, University College Dublin, for letting me hear some of their tapes of Irish and Scottish tellers: Stiofán Ó hÉalóire, Seán Ó Briain, Seán Carún; Duncan MacDonald and Neil Gillies.) When the descriptions occur at intervals as in modern oral tradition, the juxtaposition of two different styles of delivery is very effective, and has a clear function in oral recital in holding the attention of the audience. Though the language of the runs is the most admired, there is no attempt even by the most learned tellers to extend similar elaboration to the non-formulaic narrative of the tale, though some tales contain a succession of runs apparently strung together as a tour-de-force.



However the elaboration of the narrative style on the same pattern in Early Modern Irish tales seems to be an untraditional result of the esteem felt for the language of descriptions. I imagine that in the Old and Middle Irish period, tales went on being recited from memory, although the filid might use manuscripts for reference. However, the practice of reading aloud from manuscripts would mean that passages of fixed ornamental language were no longer limited to what a teller could remember, and the same degree of ornament could be added throughout, while the wording of runs could be deliberately varied. The same style was then used in other prose texts for oral recitation, such as the verse and prose genre of crosántacht<sup>1</sup>, and prose prefaces of poems<sup>2</sup>, as well as in texts not intended for oral performance at all. The prose of the Irish annals also passes 'from the terse laconic entries of the early period' to voluminous descriptions in 'the bombastic rhetorical periods characteristic of later romantic tales',<sup>3</sup> as historians 'show a partiality for the highly-cultivated metaphorical language found in non-historical literature'.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless all this elaboration seems to be closely connected with the loss in status of prose compared to verse, which would be more difficult to compose, though easier, as a fixed text, to recite well from memory. Continuous embellished prose, however word-perfect, would not create the aural variety that the traditional contrast of narrative and formulaic description cultivated, and indeed much of the long-windedness and repetition of late manuscript tales seems designed to get the story through to an audience who were not really listening. Far fewer words are used in modern oral tradition. As with poems the difficult language of the

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1. eg. *Dioghluim Dána* poem 111 p. 379.

2. *Eógan Ruadh Ó Súilleabháin* (18th. cent.) pp. 117, 135, 139, 143, 145, ed. R. Ó Foghlúchá.

3. D. Binchy, *Lawyers and Chroniclers, in Seven Centuries of Irish Learning* ed. B. Ó Cuív, Dublin 1961.

4. B. Ó Cuív *Literary Creation and Irish Historical Tradition*, PBA 1963 p. 235.

manuscript runs was omitted in some late tales.

Early tales in manuscripts seem to be deliberately brief, giving only the plot, and the dialogue which illustrates the characters, in terse laconic prose. However the use of verse for important speeches seems to be inherited from prehistoric tradition, later transferred to the new type of syllabic verse. The detail of the descriptions of people and halls, and the form of the chariot description, also seem to be ancient, while some of the alliterative formulae which appear in these descriptions probably became fixed in oral rather than written tradition. The written tales seem to have gone their own way, but for the increasing appearance of verse and descriptive passages, until the Middle Irish period.

However some tales in the Book of Leinster, especially those generally attributed to one redactor, deliberately cultivate a style much more like that of modern oral tradition, with a regular alternation of narrative and dialogue, runs and also verse. It seems to me that this pattern must have been based on contemporary oral narration, especially since the first instances of the sea-travel and feasting runs, which occur in these tales,<sup>1</sup> already contain formulae which are regular later. The collectors of the Book seem to have been anxious to record the best of contemporary narrative tradition (while retaining the linguistic archaisms of manuscript versions).

The popularity of the style of the Book of Leinster tales is corroborated by the use of the same features in the Middle Irish tales translated from the Classics into vernacular prose. Togail Troí I, which may be earlier than Táin Bó Cualnge in LL, includes

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1. CRR I para 13; MU II l.194 : Ch.VII a. exx. 11,12, pp.233-4.

the watchman device and a description of mistaken appearances in the account of the approach of the Trojan fleet<sup>1</sup>, and also contains the earliest use of the 'King and Land' description, with some recurrent phrases, as an opening run. The watchman device and mistaken appearances are also used in In Cath Cathardha<sup>2</sup> of an approaching army. This tale includes a long native description of a hag attached to the fury Erictho of Thessaly<sup>3</sup>, and the most elaborate examples ever of the arming description, attached to Pompey and Caesar.<sup>4</sup> Imthechta Aeniasa<sup>5</sup> apparently uses descriptions gathered from earlier Gaelic tradition. However the dialogue tends to be conducted in formal speeches, as in the Latin originals<sup>6</sup>, and few of these tales, translated from verse, contain any verse themselves<sup>7</sup>.

Another non-native narrative genre which has adopted the full selection of parts of narrative contained in the native tradition is Saints' Lives. These date from Old Irish to Early Modern Irish in the vernacular, but most are Middle Irish. The Lives are told in prose. Verses are used in these as in the native secular tradition, so that often the birth of a saint is foretold, or he himself prophesies, in roscad<sup>8</sup>. Other speeches

1. Quoted, Ch. IX ex (3), p. 285.
2. l. 4395f.
3. Quoted, Ch. VI ex (12), p. 184.
4. ll. 4629, 5203 ff.
5. ITS VI xiv-xv, ed. G. Calder.
6. Cath Cathardha: Lucan's Pharsalia; Togail Troí: Dares Phrygius' De Excidio Troianae.
7. C.Cath. one quatrain l. 5.
8. Betha Molaisse SG p. 18 Mochen; Betha Maignenn SG p. 46 - the end of the world.



may appear in syllabic verse<sup>1</sup>. In the later Lives verses are also quoted as proof, or used to repeat the prose<sup>2</sup>. The ordinary dialogue is again splendidly realistic, as in St. Patrick's stubborn dialogue with God through the medium of the angel Victor<sup>3</sup>, St. Senán's attempt to keep a strong-minded female saint from setting foot on his monastic island<sup>4</sup>, or St. Ruadán's flyting with the high-king Diarmait mac Cerbhaill<sup>5</sup>. Irish saints were not known for their moderation in anger, and a run describing battle fury is used of St. Finnchua<sup>6</sup>. However, whereas the themes of the classical tales, the deeds of warriors, are the same as those of native tales and thus the same conventional descriptions were suitable, many of the native runs were adapted for use in Saints Lives. A priest robes for Mass as if he were arming<sup>7</sup> or a saint divides his ascetic day into three parts, like the three divisions of the feasting run<sup>8</sup>. The proverbial comparisons of innumerability, used in secular tales of battle-carnage, are in Saints Lives used of the saints' miracles.<sup>9</sup> Descriptions of Hell are added.<sup>10</sup>

A further indication of the narrative style approved of by native tellers can be seen in the Middle Irish satirical tale, Aislinge Meic Conglinne. This parodies the monastic immrama with its poems describing a visionary journey to an Otherworld paradise of food, but also the long conventional descriptions,

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1. B. Molaisse SG p.28 dialogue; Genemain Moling ocus a Betha RC XXVII 25lf paras. 18, 37.
  2. Betha Maedhóc II BNE p.190f. paras. 7,22,30 etc.
  3. The Tripartite Life ed. W. Stokes, London 1887 pp. 116-18.
  4. Betha Shenáin Lism. Lives 1.2426.
  5. Betha Ruadáin BNE pp. 316-29 para. 40.
  6. Betha Finnchua, Lism. Lives 1.3180.
  7. Betha Eoin Bruinne Eigse VIII 225 para. 9.
  8. Betha Farannáin, Anecd. III 4 para. 7.
  9. B. Finnchua Lism. Lives 1.3073, Betha Beraig BNE I 23f para. 18.
  10. Betha Brénainn Lism. Lives 1.3632, ZCP X 412: Ch.VI ex.(7), p.177.

and lists: a doorkeeper (Aisl.MC I 89) or cleric (Aisl.MC II 124) on a horse made of food, speed preparing food (Aisl.MC I 62), travel over lands and seas of food (Aisl.MC I 83, 85), lists of characters and genealogies named as foods. (Aisl.MC I 33, 76). Only the woman who prepares the food is described normally (Aisl.MC I 97), with one of the longest tuarascbála of a beautiful woman. The proverbial expressions of numberlessness are here used of fleas in a blanket (Aisl.MC I 10), probably a parody of saints' miracles rather than secular battle - carnage.

### Conclusions.

The traditional medium of Gaelic narrative has been prose at all times, including the prehistoric period when the tales retained some sacred significance and were cultivated by the filid. The prose of oral narration was doubtless fairly full, including such aural ornaments as alliteration, rhythmic word-patterns, and structural repetition, or the telling of similar scenes in similar words, as in modern oral tales. However the first Gaelic written prose is extremely concise and unadorned.

One can presume this early prose is not simply summarizing a verse narrative tradition because the verses which do appear in

early tales have the specific function of speech-poems. Those in alliterative stressed metres, or roscad may antedate the written tradition, like the plots of the early tales themselves. Poems are preserved as fixed texts, whereas the wording of the prose narrative may always have been fairly fluid, and dependent on the skill of the individual teller. Early tales without poems may well have been redacted by people who did not know the roscada. However early poems in syllabic metres, first cultivated by Gaelic monks, also appear as speech-poems in tales, either added by the monastic redactors or by the filid themselves. These poems are more simply lyrical, while the roscada would also display the secular learned tellers' command of obscure and archaic language. Doubtless all types of verse were sung, thus contrasting with the spoken prose, though the rhythmically irregular type of roscad called retoiric may well have been chanted. Verses quoted in written tales to prove a point, or, later, to repeat the preceding prose, still preserve this cantefable tradition, which however lapses in modern oral narration. While the native literature was still cultivated by professional learned men, new poems in the classical metres were regularly added to tales, but among modern oral tellers this ceases and only a few verses of the old poems are remembered. A more important cause, however, already appears in late manuscript Fenian lore, where the tradition divides into prose tales without verses and narrative lays attributed to characters of the cycle, notably Oisín and St. Patrick. In oral tradition these prose and verse genres were often divided between different specialist tellers, reciters of tales and singers (at least in Scotland) of lays.



Other dialogue in tales, at least in Early Irish and modern oral Gaelic tradition, is given in prose in direct speech, terse and realistic. In modern oral narration the teller dramatizes the dialogue by using different voices for the characters, and the brief staccato phrases contrast with the more leisurely flow of the narrative. Though some recurrent utterances, greetings, oaths and the like, may have conventional wording, the dialogue very much belongs to the teller to improvise as he sees fit. Even in the earliest written tales dialogue appears and gives the impression of being based on ordinary speech. However in these the style of the prose narrative is equally brief, and may well have the same source, if the redactor was unable, or unwilling, to reproduce the narrative style of the filid.

Conventional descriptions, absent from the earliest written tales, appear in many oral literatures, and on similar themes to those found in Gaelic tradition. In these as in modern Gaelic oral tradition the description is recited as a fixed text (hence the term 'runs') by the teller, at any suitable point in any of his tales, as a display of his linguistic skill. The descriptions of Gaelic manuscript tales must also have had an oral tradition, and may have been left out of the first recordings simply because they were known by heart and not restricted to any one tale. However the tuarascála of people, chariots, and halls use archaic terminology that may not have been generally known. Some of the modern oral tellers have versions of descriptions very close to those in manuscripts, and are **d**earely proud of their obscure language.

The early description of the chariot is in roscad, and some of the other early descriptions, which are told in prose sentences as short and plain as the narrative, give the impression they may have been abridged from the oral original, possibly in verse.

The main function of runs in modern oral tradition is clearly for aural decoration. They are recited in contrast to the narrative in a rapid chant, and long sentences inherited from the manuscript tradition are broken down into lines of regular length, often giving the impression of verse. Various ornaments of stressed verse (alliteration, rhythm, the repetition of the same syntactic pattern in successive lines) are prevalent in the elaborate prose descriptions of Middle and Early Modern Irish manuscript tales. However, while I think that two ancient genres of heightened language, stressed verse and ornamental prose, have influenced each other, there seems no need to assume that all descriptions were once in verse, but rather that the features common to both were those brought out by oral performance. The continuous elaboration of the prose narrative in Early Modern Irish tales in the manner of the conventional descriptions seems designed to be heard and, like the runs, admired, but obscures any difference in recitation between narrative and run.

I conclude that these four elements in Gaelic narrative (simple narrative prose, verses, realistic direct speech and formulaic 'runs') all derive ultimately from native oral tradition.

Oral recitation must have been continuous, but its constituent parts at various times influence the written tradition. In early manuscript tales the plots were written down, for reference, by redactors who produced a new artistic written style, exploiting the use of dialogue for characterization and using the same succinct prose for the narrative. Oral transmission must have continued side by side, for later written tales contain descriptions and roscada that are clearly ancient, as well as poems in syllabic verse composed either by the redactors or the oral storytellers. In Middle Irish the written texts begin to give the norm for oral recitation, as in TBC II (1.4919) 'A blessing on him who shall memorize the Táin as it is here written, and shall not add any other form to it.' In Early Modern Irish tales reading aloud from the manuscript is taken for granted, so that the admired elaborate language of the description is generalized for the entire narrative. Simple prose is reinstated for the narrative of these tales in Modern oral tradition, interspersed with dialogue and 'runs'.

I conclude that the style of traditional oral narrative, established before the coming of writing to the Gaelic areas, consisted of constant variation of these four elements, each with its own special style of delivery-spoken prose, dramatized dialogue, sung verse and chanted run. Such a variation appears on the manuscript page in tales such as TBC II, MU II and CRR I in the Book of Leinster. It also appears in oral tradition in both Scotland and Ireland, where it cannot be a recent phenomenon but must at



least antedate the division of the countries under English rule from the 17th century and before. Developments may occur in the style of both written and oral tales, but in the main the traditional style of Gaelic narrative is that shaped and stabilized by the constant oral tradition.

### Bibliography I - Tales

This is a bibliography of tales quoted in the text (titles or abbreviations underlined) with reference to the thematic groups of Tale-Lists A and B, and including the titles found in them for tales referred to and extant under another name. An edition with translation is given wherever possible.

The Tale-Lists referred to are:

List A Do Nemthigud Filed i Scélaib LL II. 24916 - 25009, ed. & tr. E. O'Curry, Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History pp. 584-93.

List B, forming paras. 3-8 of the tale Airecc Menman Uraird maic Coisse q.v.

Remscéla 'Foretales' of Táin Bó Cuailnge. Two versions:

- (i) in LL 32901-32909, after Fallsigud Tána Bó Cualnge q.v., the first remscél,
- (ii) independently in RIA D.4.2, ed. K. Meyer, RC VI p.191.

The information about each extant text is intended to convey, roughly, the style (use of verse, runs etc.) and date of the language (failing which, the date of the earliest MS) and the context of the tale in the manuscript tradition and in the literary cycles, with a brief summary of the plot. All tales have the narrative in prose and the dialogue in direct speech, unless otherwise indicated.

Complete manuscript sources are not given, and obviously it is often hard to decide which is the most significant manuscript from several contemporaries. In other cases the oldest source is given. The 'cycles' are the modern classification, into Ulster, King, Mythological or Finn tales. 'King tale of 7th century' refers to the native chronology of these characters, not the language of the text. For references to oral versions see Bruforð, 1966.

Acallam na Senórach 'Colloquy of the Aged Men' (Acall.) Ed. and tr. between W. Stokes, IT IV 1, and SG p. 94, from Laud 610, Lismore etc. Late M.Ir. syllabic poems, runs, subtitles. Readings from later version in Franciscan ms. (Fr.) given in the notes in IT. Finn cycle, frame tale: Caelte and surviving Fenians tell St. Patrick their adventures in the different parts of Ireland, including some tales from other cycles.

Aided 'Untimely Death', List A, 13-15 titles.

Aided Aenfhir Aife (AAA) 'Death of Aife's Only Son'. Ed. and tr. K. Meyer, Ériu I 113-121 (1904), from YBL etc. O. Ir. Dialogue in roscad. Ulster cycle: Cú Chulainn kills his son by Aife because he will not name himself to him. Oral, Ireland and Scotland.

Aided Blai Briugad 'Death of Blai the hospitaller' (List A) +  
Aided Cheltchair q.v.

Aided Cheltchair maic Uithechair 'Death of Celtchar son of Uithechar' List A. Ed. Death Tales, p.24 from LL 118b and Edin. XL.O. Ir., Ulster cycle: Celtchar kills Blai for sleeping with his wife, and as éric must kill Conganchneas, a monster, and his own hound, the blood of which runs along the spear and poisons him.

Oidedh Chloinne Lir (OCL) 'Death of Ler's Children', ed. and tr.

R. O'Duffy, 1893, from 18thc. MS etc. Syllabic poems, list.

Mythological: Wife of Otherworld Ler turns her stepchildren to swans till Deoch and Lairgnen marry; 900 years later when they return to human form St. Patrick baptizes them and they die and go to Heaven. Oral, Ireland and Scotland.



Oidedh Chloinne Tuireann 'Death of Tuireann's Children' (OCT),  
ed. and tr. R. O'Duffy, 1888, from 19thc. MSS. Syllabic poems, runs.  
Mythological: Lugh sets impossible éric to be paid by Tuireann's  
three sons who killed his father by mistake. Oral, Ireland.

Oidedh Chloinne Uisnech 'Death of Uisnech's Children, (OCU), late version  
of Longes Mac nUislenn, q.v., beginning with Conchobar's decision  
to ask the sons of Uisnech to return. Glenmasan (15thc.) ed. and  
tr. W. Stokes, IT II 2 109-184, YBL ed. and tr. E. O'Curry, GJ I  
378-391, II 10-17. Syllabic poems, runs. Oral, Ireland and Scotland.

Aided Chonchobair 'Death of Conchobar', List A. Four versions,  
A, B, C, D, ed. Death Tales p.2 from LL 123b, 23.N.10, LFF, D IV 2.  
O. Ir.: Roscad (ABC), syllabic poems (D), run (A). Ulster cycle:  
(Cet steals Mes Gegra's brain-ball from the Ulstermen, slings it  
at Conchobar's head; Fíngen makes the wound heal over: A only).  
Conchobar is told of Christ's Crucifixion and is seized with battle-  
fury, the wound bursts and he dies.

Aided Chon Culaind 'Death of Cú Chulainn' (ACC)

I LL 119a, 13763-14295, sole ms (given title above); partial ed.  
and tr. W. Stokes, RC III 175-185. O. Ir.: Syllabic poem,  
roscada, runs.

II ed. A. van Hamel, Med & Mod Ir. Ser. III, from 16thc. ms (which  
omits: poems included in 17thc. mss ed. J. Hogan GJ XI 81ff.,  
second part/Deargruathar Conaill Chernaig GJ XVII 305ff.) E.  
Mod. Ir.: Roscad and syllabic poems, runs. Ulster cycle: Clann  
Calatín avenge their father's death in TBC by luring Cú Chulainn  
to break his geasa. He dies, but is avenged by Conall Cernach.  
Oral, Ireland and Scotland.

Aided Chon Ruí 'Death of Cú Ruí' (ACR) List A. Ed. and tr.

R. Best, *Ériu* II 20-31, from YBL; (also an obscure O.Ir. version from Eg. 88, 32-5) 10thc. Syllabic poems, roscad 'Amra Conroí' run. Ulster cycle: Cú Ruí's wife Bláthnat betrays how he may be killed to Cú Chulainn, his poet Ferchertne then leaps with her to their deaths.

Aided Diarmada meic Fergus Cerrbeóil 'Death of Diarmaid son of Fergus Cerrbél', ed. SG 72-82 from Eg 1782, M.Ir.: roscad and syllabic poems, runs. King tale of 6thc.: Diarmaid suffers a threefold death in the otherworld hall of Banbán, after various seemingly-impossible conditions have been fulfilled.

Aided Fhergus meic Léide 'Death of Fergus mac Léide'. Two versions: I O.Ir., from H.3.18 etc. (legal MSS), ed. and tr. D. Binchy, *Ériu* XVI 33-48 (1952). roscad and syllabic verse. II ed. SG from Eg.1782, sole MS.E.Mod.Ir.: as above, with runs. King-tale: Fergus visits the leprechauns, dies fighting a water-monster.

Aided Fhergus maic Róich 'Death of Fergus mac Róech' Aided Fhergus List A Ed. Death Tales, from Edin. XL.O.Ir.: Ulster cycle: Ailill gets his blind brother to cast at Fergus who is swimming with Medb.

Aided Fhinn 'Death of Finn', List A, H only. Several different accounts: II = Finn and the hunt of *Síd na mBan Finn*', ed. and tr. K. Meyer, *Fianaigecht*, from Eg. 1782, sole MS.E.Mod.Ir.: Syllabic poems, runs. After boar-hunt Finn wants to leave Ireland because of prophecy of doom; prevented and battle ensues.

Aided Fhir Diad 'Death of Fer Diad', List A. Extant as Comracc Fir Diad.

(Aided Gairb Glinne Rige (AGG) 'Death of Garb of Glen Rige'

(Aided Guill meic Carbada 'Death of Goll mac Carbada', ed. and tr. W. Stokes, RC XIV 396-449, from 107b LL etc. M.Ir.: runs, syllabic verse. Romantic Ulster tale; Cú Chulainn deals with one invading, one Irish giant.

Aided Maíl Fhatharlaig meic Rónáin 'Death of Mael Fatharlaig son of Rónán', List A; extant as Fingal Rónáin, q.v.

Aided Muirchertach meic Erca 'Death of Muirchertach son of Erc' ed. and tr. W. Stokes, RC XXIII 395-437 (1902), from YBL etc. Late M.Ir. Roscad and syllabic poems, runs. King tale of 6thc: Muirchertach meets a threefold death in the hall of Cleitech after abandoning his Christian wife for a supernatural woman.

Aided Néill Noígiallaig 'Death of Niall of the Nine Hostages', tr. and ed. K. Meyer, *Otia Mers.* II 84-92 (1900), from Rawl. B.502 etc. M.Ir. Syllabic quatrains, run. King tale of 4thc: Eochu son of Enna Censelach shoots Niall with an arrow, but his daughter betrays him to Niall's son Fergus.

Aígeacht Artuir 'Visiting of Arthur' List A (Orgain) Extant in Capthréim Conghail q.v.

Aígeacht Aithirne 'Visiting of Aithirne', ed. and tr. K. Meyer, *Ériu* VII 1-9 from 118a LL etc. E.M.Ir. Roscada, some descriptive. Ulster cycle: poet Aithirne visits his foster-son Amargen, who stops him leaving for a year with poems describing the seasons.

Airec Menman Uraird meic Coisse 'The Stratagem of Urard mac Coisse' ed. M. E. Byrne, *Anecd.* II 42-76, from Rawl. B.512 etc. 11th-century, includes Tale-list B. Syllabic poems, runs. The fili Mac Coisse adds



a new allegorical tale to the traditional repertoire to get redress from his king.

Airne Fíngin 'Fíngen's Night-watch', ed. J. Vendryes, *Med. and Mod. Ir. Ser. XV*, from Lismore etc. List B 'gnáthscél', 9th-10th century. Syllabic poems, run. An Otherworld woman on Samain-eve prophesies to Fíngen ten portents of Conn Cétchathach's birth.

Aislinge 'Vision'; not in the Lists.

Aislinge Meic Con Glinne 'The Vision of Mac Con Glinne'. (Aisl.M.C.) ed. and tr. K. Meyer from LB (I), H 3 18 (II); London 1892. 12th-century. Syllabic poems, runs. The poet Mac Con Glinne saves himself and heals his king by telling his vision of a voyage to an Otherworld Land of Food.

(Aislingi in Maic Óig 'The Vision of the Young Son'. (List B, gnáthscél, TBC remscél) See next :

Aislinge Oenguso (meic in Daghdha) 'The Vision of Angus son of the Daghdha' (Aisl. Oeng.) TBC remscéla II; ed. F. Shaw 'The Dream of Oengus', Dublin 1934, from Eg. 1782 etc. 8th-century; The Otherworld Oengus dreams of and wins an Otherworld bride, helped by Ailill and Medb, whose help he returns on TBC.

Aitheda 'Elopements'; Lists A (12 titles), B (7 titles) None extant under this title.

Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn 'The Elopement of Derdriu with the sons of Uisliu'. List A Extant as Longes mac nUislenn, q.v. Ulster cycle.

Aithed Gráinne re Diarmait 'The Elopement of Gráinne with Diarmait'. List A, B. Finn cycle. See 'Uath Beinne Étair'. Extant in later

form in Tóraigecht Diarmada agus Gráinne.

Altram Tige Da Medar 'The Fostering in the House of Two Vessels' (Altram TDM) ed. and tr. L. Duncan, Ériu XI 184-225, from Fermoy, the sole MS.E.Mod.Ir. Syllabic poems, runs. Christianised mythological tale: Angus' foster-daughter Eithne rejects Otherworld food and is received by St. Patrick.

Amaingen: tale of the poet's first utterance; ed. R. Best, Ir. Texts I, pp. 32-33 O.Ir.; Run.

B.

Bás Cearbhall agus Farbhlaíde 'The Death of Cearbhall and Farbhlaíde' (BCF) ed. and tr. E. Ó Neachtain, Ériu IV 47-67, from 17thc ms E.Mod.Ir: Syllabic poems, runs. Romantic love tale: Poet hero and princess die for love of each other.

Bodach an Chóta Lachtna 'The Rustic in the Drab Coat' (BCL) ed. SG (I 289-94). 17thc. Runs. Finn-tale: enemy defeated by supernatural helper. Oral Scotland and Ireland.

Bórama Laigen 'The Cattle-Tribute of Leinster', ed. and tr. W. Stokes, RC XIII 32-124, from 294b LL etc. Mid.Ir.: Roscad and syllabic poems (most omitted by editor), sub-titles. King tale of 1st to 6thc.: Tuathal Techtmar exacts tribute from Leinster after their king married both his daughters Fithir and Dáirine, who died of shame when they found out. Subsequent kings attempt to exact it, until St. Moling gets it remitted till 'Monday' - the day of Doom.

Bruiden 'Hall, Brawl' Not in Lists.

Bruidhean Bheag na hAlmhaine 'The Little Brawl (Hall?) at Allen', ed. SG (I 336-341); ed.N.ní Sheaghda, LSS II 16-39 from oldest

(BBA)

(1603) MS. Runs. Finn-tale, on the feud between Clann Baoisgne and Clann Morna.

Bruidhean Chaorthainn 'The Rowan-tree Hall' (BC) ed. P. mac Piarais, Dublin 1900, from 18thc. MSS; oldest is 1603. Syllabic poem, runs. Finn-tale; defeated Viking invader invites Finn and men to feast in his supernatural hall, where they stick to the seats until rescued by Diarmaid. Oral Ireland and Scotland.

Bruidhean Chéise Chorainn 'The Hall at Keshcorran' (BCC) ed. SG (I 306-310); ed. N. ní Shéaghdha, LSS II pp. 3-15, from oldest MS, 1609. (Syllabic poem), runs. Finn-tale: Goll rescues Finn and men from three hags. Oral, Ireland.

Bruiden Da Choca 'The Hall of Da Choca', (Togail Bruidne Da Choca of Lists) Ed. and tr. W. Stokes, RC XXI 149-165, 312-327, 388-402, (BD) from H.3.18 etc. E.Mod.Ir., Syllabic poems (omitted by editor), runs, subtitles. Ulster cycle: Cormac Conl<sup>n</sup>ges becomes king of the Ulaid after Conchobar, breaks his geasa, and falls prey to Connaught raiders in Da Choca's hall.

Bruidhean Eochaidh Bhig Dheirg 'Little Red-haired Eochaidh's Hall' (BEED) ed. M. ní Mhuirgheasa, LSS II 40-91, from 17thc. MS. Runs. Finn-tale. Oral, Scotland and Ireland.

Buile 'Vision, Frenzy'. List B only, 5 titles.

Buile Shuibhne 'The Frenzy of Sweeney', ed. and tr. J. O'Keefe, ITS vol. XII, from 17thc. MSS. Mid.Ir.; prose narrative, dialogue, syllabic poems, runs. King-tale of 7thc.: Suibhne goes mad in the Battle of Magh Rath, and lives in the wilds till his death in Moling's monastery.



Cath 'Battle' List A, 9 titles, B, 8 titles.

Cath Aenaigh Macha 'The Battle of the Assembly of Macha', ed. and tr. M. Dobbs, ZCP XVI 145-161, from 16thc. MS. Roscad and syllabic poems, lists.

Cath Airtig 'Battle of Airtech', ed. and tr. R. Best, Ériu VIII 170-190, from Lecan etc. 13thc.? Roscad (run). Ulster cycle: Cúscraid made king after EDC.

Cath Almaine 'The Battle of Allen', ed. and tr. W. Stokes, RC XXIV 4-70 from YBL etc. Mid.Ir.; Syllabic poems, runs. King-tale of 8thc.: Fergal mac Maíle Duín killed in battle, as is his minstrel, whose head sings to him as promised.

Cath Catharda 'The Civil War' (CCath) ed. and tr. W. Stokes, IT IV2, from 15thc. MS. Mid.Ir. translation of Lucan's Pharsalia; runs, subtitles.

Cath Chrionna 'Battle of Crinna', ed. SG (I 319-326) from Lismore etc. Roscad and syllabic poems, run. King-tale of 3rdc.: Cormac mac Airt bribes Tadg mac Cein to fight the Ulaid.

Cath Cúla Dremne 'Battle of Cúla Dremne', ed. P. Walsh, JMW 1926 pp. 3-11, from 16thc. MS. Syllabic poems, runs. King-tale of 6thc.; Colum Cille leaves Ireland.

Cath Cumair 'Battle of Cumar' (List A, Argain Echach for a maccaib) Ed. and tr. M. Dobbs, RC XLIII pp. 277-342, from 18thc. MS. Lang. modern; syllabic poems, runs. Ulster tale: Medb's brothers rebel against their father.

Cath Findchoradh 'Battle of Findchora', ed. and tr. M. Dobbs, ZCP XIV 393-420 from 17thc. MS. Roscad on Bulls, syllabic poems, runs. Ulster cycle: meeting of the Bulls of TBC.

Cath Finntrágha 'Battle of Ventry' (CF) ed. and tr. K. Meyer, Oxon. 1885, ed. C. O'Rahilly, Med. and Mod. Ir. Ser. XX (CF2) from Rawl. B 487 15thc. MS.E.Mod.Ir.; runs, (syllabic poem). Finn-tale: Finn is nearly killed fighting off the invading 'King of the World'. Oral Ireland.

Cath Gabhra 'Battle of Gabhra', ed. and tr. N. O'Kearney, Oss. I p.134, runs. Finn-tale: their last battle, against their former patron, king Cairbre mac Airt.

Cath Leitreach Ruibhe 'Battle of Leitir Ruibe', ed. and tr. M. Dobbs, RC XXXIX 1-32, from 15thc. MS etc. Syllabic poems, lists. Ulster cycle; Eochaidh Feidlech makes himself highking; Conchobar makes him pay an éric for his father.

Cath Maighe Léana 'Battle of Magh Léana' (CML) ed. and tr. K. Jackson, Med. and Mod. Ir. Ser. IX, from 16thc. MS etc. E.Mod.Ir.; syllabic and roscad poems, runs. King-tale of 2ndc.: Éoghan Mór, whence the Eóghanachta, divides Ireland with Conn Cédchathach, then is killed by him.

Cath Maighe Mucrimhe 'Battle of Magh Mucrimhe' (CMM) I ed. and tr. M. O'Daly, ITS L (1975) from LL 288a etc. O.Ir., syllabic poems, runs. List A,B. II ed. M. Ó Dúnlainge, GJ XVII 385f., XVIII 30f. from late MSS. E.Mod.Ir.: prose narrative, dialogue, roscad and syllabic poems, runs. King-tale of 3rdc.: Lugaid mac Con becomes high-king after exile in Scotland. Oral Scotland.

Cath Maige Rath 'Battle of Mag Rath' (CMR) I ed. and tr. C. Marstrander, Ériu V 226-247, from YBL.E.Mid.Ir.; syllabic poems, runs. II ed. and tr. J. O'Donovan, Dublin 1842, from YBL and paper MSS. 14thc.; inflated narrative and dialogue, syllabic poems, runs. List A. King-tale of 7thc.: Congal Claen fights Downall mac Aeda with Scots army, is killed; Suibne goes mad and Cennfaelad loses his 'brain of forgetting'.

Cath Maige Tuired 'Battle of Moytura' (CMT(i)), ed. and tr. J. Fraser, Ériu VIII 1-63, from H.2.17 Mid.Ir.; roscad and syllabic poems, runs. Mythological cycle: the Tuatha Dé Danann invade Ireland, ousting the Fir Bolg; their king Nuadu loses his hand in the battle and is replaced by Bres.

Cath Maige Tuired (Second) 'Battle of Moytura' (CMT(ii)), ed. and tr. W. Stokes, RC XII 52-130 etc., from Harl. 5280, sole MS. O.Ir. roscad and syllabic poems, runs. Mythological cycle: Bres' behaviour provokes a battle won by the Tuatha Dé Danann against the Fomóire, Lug mac Eithlend becomes king of Ireland. Lists A, B.

Cath Ruís na Ríg 'Battle of Rosnaree' (CRR) ed. and tr. E. Hogan, RIA Todd IV, 1892. I from LL 171a, sole MS. Mid.Ir.; roscad and syllabic poems, runs. II from 18thc. MSS; 15thc.; roscad and syllabic poems, dialogue, runs. Ulster cycle: Conchobar wants a decisive victory over Ailill and Medb after TBC. Ulaid nearly routed till rallied by Cú Chulainn.

Cathcharpat Searra 'The Sickled Chariot' ed. and tr. C. O'Rahilly, Celtica XI 194-202, from LL, sole MS. M.Ir. run, describing Cú Chulainn.

Cathréim 'Battle-Career'. Not in Lists.

Caithréim Conghail Chláiringnigh 'The Battle-Career of Conghal Cláiringnech' (Caithr Congh) ed. and tr. P. MacSweeney, ITS V (1904), from 17thc. MSS. E.Mod.Ir.; roscad and syllabic poems, runs, subtitles: Ulster cycle with 'Romantic' episodes: Conghal wins the kingship of Ulster from Fergus mac Léide, becomes High-king, has adventures with Arthur in Britain and pursuing princesses overseas.



Caithréim Thoirdhealbhagh 'The Battle-Career of Toirdhealbhach'

(Caithr. Thoirdh.) ed. and tr. S. O'Grady, ITS XXVI & XXVII (1929), from 18thc. MSS. 14thc.; rosg and syllabic poems, runs. 'Historical', 12th to 14thc. Thomond.

Céilidhe Iosgaide Léithe 'The Visit of Grey Hock' (CIL) ed. M. mac an

tSaoí, Dhá Sgéal Arturaíochta, Dublin 1946. 17th and 18thc. MSS.

Syllabic poems, runs. Romantic tale: an Otherworld woman discomfits Arthur's court.

Céisneamh Ingeine Guill (Complaining of Goll's Daughter' (CIG)

(Erchoitmed Ingeine Gulide) ed. and tr. K. Meyer, Hibernica Minora,

Oxford 1894, from Rawl. B.512. E.Mid.Ir.; long speeches. King-tale

of 4thc.: Gulide at first refuses hospitality to Feidlimid mac Crimthainn on circuit.

Cogadh Gaedheal re Gallaibh 'The War of the Gaels with the Foreigners'

(Cog.) ed. and tr. J. Todd, London 1867, from LL 309a and later

MSS.Mid.Ir.: runs, syllabic poems. Historical tale: the Viking invasions to the battle of Clontarf.

Coimheasgar na Curadh 'Combat of the Champions' (CNC) ed. M.ní

Chléirigh, ISS VI, 1942, from 18thc. MS. Two syllabic poems, runs,

subtitles. Romantic tale with characters of Ulster cycle.

Comperta 'Conceptions'. List B only, 5 titles.

Compert Con Culainn 'Conception of Cú Chulainn' List B, TBC

Remscéla. (Feis Tighe Beccfholtaig (later version) q.v., also in

TBC remscéla II) ed. A. Van Hamel, Med. and Mod. Ir. Ser. III,

from LU 128a etc. Early 8thc: roscad poems. Ulster cycle:

Conchobar's daughter Deichtire acquires a fairy child who dies,

becomes pregnant after seeing the god Lugh and swallowing a worm,  
but miscarries; marries Sualdam and has a son, Cú Chulainn.  
Oral, Ireland.

Compert Chonchobhair 'Conception of Conchobhar' List B TBC

remscéla I. Ulster cycle. I ed. and tr. V. Hull, Ir. Texts IV  
4-12, from Rawl. B.512 etc. Anecdote only: Ness unites with  
Cathbadh the druid on a lucky day for conception, bears Conchobar.  
II ed. and tr. K. Meyer, RC VI 173-182, from D IV 2.E.Mid.Ir.:  
two syllabic poems. Cathbad forces Ness to marry him, but Conchobar  
is begotten either by her lover Fachtna Fáthach, or from worms  
Cathbad made her swallow.

Compert Chorbmaic huí Cuind 'Conception of Cormac grandson of Conn'  
List B. Extant as Genemain Cormaic ua Chuinn.

Comrac 'Encounter'. Not in Lists.

Comracc Fir Diad ocus Con Culainn 'The Encounter of Fer Diad and Cú  
Chulainn' (CFD) (Aided Fir Diad, List A) Episode of TBC (I 2567, II 2606),  
also independently later. Text of Franciscan MS 16 (Fr.) ed. R. Best,  
ZCP X 274-308, plus a fragment from H.2.12. Fr. runs, two syllabic  
quatrains, H.2.12 runs. Cú Chulainn kills his fosterbrother, who  
has been forced to fight him to save his honour. Oral, Ireland  
and Scotland.

Comracc Liadain ocus Cuirithir 'The Encounter of Liadan and  
Cuirithir' ed. and tr. K. Meyer, London 1902, from Harl. 5280  
etc. O.Ir.: syllabic poems. Poet-lovers parted forever when Liadan  
takes the veil.

Cophar in dá Muccida 'The Begetting of the two Swineherds' List B  
gnathscél, TBC remscél. Two versions ed. and tr. (German) E. Windisch,

IT III. I from LL; O.Ir.; prose narrative, dialogue, roscad describing Bulls. II from Eg. 1782; Mid.Ir., runs. Ulster cycle: the Otherworld swineherds of Munster and Connaught quarrel, they change into different shapes and are swallowed and reborn as the two Bulls of TBC.

Crónán Mhac Imilit (oral), see BCC, p.379 above.

## D

Deirdire (oral) see Lg, OCU, pp.393,374.

Díthreabhach Glinne an Phéice 'The Hermit of Glenfeic' (DGP) ed.

and tr. A. Bruford, Éigse XII 301f, from 17thc. MS. Runs. King-tale of 11thc./Romance: Murchadh mac Briain Bórainhe is led by a magic stag to the Hermit, who tells him how he acquired the stag, his hound, and his wife. Oral, Scotland and Ireland.

## E

Echtraí 'Adventures (to the Otherworld)' List A, 14 titles; B, 9-10 titles.

Echtra Airt meic Cuind 'Adventure of Art son of Conn' (EAC) List B.

Ed. and tr. R. Best, Ériu III 147-173, from Fermoy, sole MS.E.Mod. Ir.: runs. King-tale of 2ndc.: Art is bespelled by his stepmother to seek an Otherworld bride oversea.

Eachtra Aodha Duibh 'Adventure of Black Hugh' (EAD) ed. B. Ó. Cuív,

Éigse XII 39-60, from 19thc. MSS.Mod.lang.: runs. Romance: Aodh Dubh bespelled to go to Babylon after seeing a magic stag, wins daughter of the king of Greece.

Eachtra Aodh mhic Goireachtaidh 'Adventure of Aodh mac Goireachtaidh'

(EAG) ed. N. Williams, Éigse XIII 111-43, from 18thc. MSS. Runs, amhrán poem. 18thc. satire: Aodh arrives at a magic hall while hunting, after various bawdy adventures wakes up in his own bed.



Eachtra Chéadaigh Mhoir 'Adventure of Céadach the Great' (ECM)

Unpublished Romantic tale, see A Bruford 1966 p.258. Oral, Ireland and Scotland.

Eachtra in Cheithearnaigh Chaoilriabhaigh 'The Adventure of the Narrow-Striped Kerne' (ECCR) ed. SG I 276-288 from MS c.1800.

Syllabic quatrains, runs. 16thc. satire: Supernatural visitor discomfits various Irish chieftains in their courts. Oral, Scotland.

Eachtra Chloinne Rígh na hIoruaidhe 'Adventure of the Children of the King of Ioruadh' (ECRI) Ed. and tr. D. Hyde, ITS I (1899) from 17thc. MSS.E.Mod.Ir.: runs. Romance: heroes bespelled on a series of oversea adventures by a lady they meet when out hunting. Oral, Ireland.

Echtra Chon Culainn 'Cú Chulainn's Adventure' Lists A, B/Serglige Con Culainn q.v./his sojourn in Scotland, T. Emire paras 60-81?

Echtra Chonla meic Chuinn Chétchathaig 'Adventure of Conla, son of Conn of the Hundred Battles' ed. and tr. J. Pokorny (German), ZCP XVIII 193-205, from LU f.120, YBL, 23.N.10 etc. 8thc.: roscad and syllabic poems. Connla goes away with a woman who described the Other World to him, despite his father's druid.

Eachtra Chormaic (uí Chuinn/i Tír Tairrngire) 'Cormac (grandson of Conn)'s Adventure (to the Land of Promise) List B. Ed. and tr. W. Stokes, IT III, from YBL etc. The 'adventure' proper, paras 24-54, occurs separately, ed. and tr. S. O'Grady, Oss. III, from Fermoy etc. E.Mod.Ir.: roscad and syll. quatrain (paras 13, 77), runs. King-tale of 3rdc.: Cormac establishes twelve 'Truths of Kingship' at the Feast of Tara, 12th is his branch (para 24) gained from an Otherworld warrior who took Cormac's family to his castle, whence they were rescued by the telling of 4 true tales.

Eachtra na cCuradh 'Adventure of the Champions' (ENC) ed. M. ní Chléirigh, LSS I, from 18thc. MSS. Syllabic poems, runs, subtitles. Romance: adventures of Ulster cycle characters in Oversea islands.

Eachtra Ghiolla an Fhiugha 'Adventure of the lad with the Billhook' (EGF) Ed. and tr. D. Hyde, ITS I from 19thc. MSS. Mod.Ir.: runs. Romantic king-tale of 11thc.: Murchadh son of Brian Bóramha meets supernatural lad from lake. Oral Ireland and Scotland.

Eachtra Iollainn Airdheirg (EIA) 'Adventure of Iollann with the Red Weapons'. Unpublished Romantic tale, see A. Bruford 1966 p.259. Oral, Ireland and Scotland.

Echtra Laegaire meic Chrimthainn go Mag Mell 'Adventure of Laegaire son of Crimthann to the Plain of Delight' ed. and tr. K. Jackson, Speculum XVII 377-389m, from LL f.275b etc. O.Ir. (poems Mid.Ir.?) runs; syllabic poems in LL only. Laegaire invited to Otherworld to help in battle, marries and remains there.

Eachtra Léithín Léithín's Adventure' ed. and tr. D. Hyde, Celtic Review X 116-143, from 18thc. etc. MSS. Syllabic poems. Eagle Léithín tells clerics of Clonmacnoise how the Crow of Achill sent her to find out the coldest day ever, and ate her chicks.

Eachtra Lomnochtáin an t-Sléibhe Riffe 'Adventure of Lomnochtán from Sliabh Riff'. (ELSR) Ed. and tr. O. Bergin and E. MacNeill, GJ VIII 168f, IX 231f, from unspecified MSS. Modern Irish: runs. Romantic Finn-tale.

Echtra Mhac nEachach Muigmedóin 'Adventure of Eochu Muigmedón's Sons' (EME) ed. and tr. W. Stokes, RC XXIV pp. 192-203, from YBL etc. 11thc.; Roscad and syllabic poems, runs. King-tale of 4thc.:

Niall (Noígiállach), son of a slave, is the only one of his brothers who will embrace a hideous hag; she is Sovranty, he the next high-king.

Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair 'Adventure of Eagle-Boy' (EMI)

ed. and tr. R. MacAlister, ITS X, from 18thc. MS. Syllabic poems, runs. Romance: Eagle carries off posthumous child of the rightful prince; he lives to rescue various maidens and reclaim the kingdom.

Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil 'Adventure of the Cropeared Dog' (EMM)

ed. and tr. R. MacAlister, ITS X, from 18thc. MS, runs. Arthurian Romance: Sir Galahad and dog (an enchanted prince) defend Arthur's court from Ridire an Lochrainn.

Eachtra Mhelóra agus Orlando 'Adventure of Melóra and Orlando' (EMO)

ed. M. mac an tSaoí, Dhá Sgéal Arturaíochta, Dublin 1946, from 17thc. MS, runs. Arthurian Romance.

Echtra Nerai 'Nera's Adventure' List A, B; TBC remseála I. Ed.

and tr. K. Meyer, RC X 212-28, from Eg. 1782 etc. O.Ir.: syllabic poems. Ulster cycle: Nera follows an Otherworld host into the cave of Cruachu at Samain and marries; his son's cow is bulled by the Donn Cualnge. (E.Nerai)

Eachtra Ridire<sup>na</sup> Léomhan 'Adventure of the Knight of the Lions' (ERL)

ed. A. ní Chroínín, LSS XVIII, from 18thc. MS, runs. Romance of French origin.

Eachtra Thaidhg mhic Chéin 'Adventure of Tadhg son of Cian' (ETC)

Ed. SG (I 342-9) from Lismore, sole MS. E.Mod.Ir.: prose narrative, dialogue, roscad and syllabic poems, runs. King-tale of 4thc.: Tadhg pursues wife abducted to Spain, finds island paradise.



Erchoitmed Ingine Gulide see CIG

Esnada Tige Buchet 'The Songs of Buchat's House' (ETB) ed. and tr. W. Stokes, RC XXV pp. 18-38, from LL 270a etc. 10thc.: roscad.

King-tale of 3rdc.: Cormac mac Airt finds his bride Eithne, mother of Cairpre Lifechair, tending the impoverished Buchat, restores him to his former wealth and powers of generosity.

Fallsigud Tána Bó Cualnge 'The Revealing of Táin Bó Cuailnge' TBC remscéla II. Various versions: LL 245b, 32879-32909; ed. K. Meyer, Arch. III 3-5, from D. IV 2, Eg. 1782 - also in Tromdám Guaire, q.v. LL 12thc. : roscad, run. Senchán Torpéist and Poets of Ireland get Fergus mac Róich to rise from his grave to tell them the full text of TBC, since they no longer know it.

Fessa 'Nights spent, Feasts' List A, 17 titles; B, 7-8 titles.

(Feis Dúin Bolg 'Night spent in the Fort of the Bags' List A.

Extant as Cath Dúin Bolg, Bórama para 119 q.v.

(Feis Dúin Buchet 'Night spent in Buchet's Fort'. List A. Extant as Esnada Tige Buchet q.v.

Feis Tige Becfholtaig 'The Night in Becfholtach's House' TBC remscéla II, later version of Compert Con Culainn q.v. Ed. K. Meyer, ZCP V 500-504, from DIV 2.9thc.: Roscad, itinerary. Ulster cycle: Magic birds lead Conchobar to a hall where his sister Deichtire, missing for three years, is about to give birth to a child. Morand judges that Sencha, Bláí Briuga, Fergus and Amargen shall all foster him.

Feis Tige Bricrenn 'The Feast in Bricriu's House' List B. Extant as Fled Bricrenn, q.v.

Feis Tige Chonáin 'The Night in Conán's House' (FTC) ed. and tr. N. O'Kearney, Oss.II, from 18thc. MS; ed. M. Joynt, Med. and Mod. Ir. Ser. VII, from Northern MS c.1700 etc. E.Mod.Ir.: syllabic poems (more in North), runs (Oss. only). Fenian frame-tale: Finn lost on hunt arrives at the 'Bruiden' of Conán, forced to tell him stories; including how he got his hound Bran, meeting with allegorical figures of Sloth, Old Age, the World etc. in the 'bruiden' of Cuanna.

Fingal Rónáin 'Rónán's Kin-murder' (Fing.R.) ed. and tr. K. Meyer, RC XIII pp. 368-397, from LL 271a etc. Late O.Ir.: syllabic poems. King-tale c.600 AD; Rónán king of Leinster has his son Mael Fothartaig killed after his young wife has falsely accused him of soliciting her. (Aided Mael Fhatharlaig, List A.)

Físi 'Visions' List A, B; same 4 titles.

Fled Bricrenn 'Bricriu's Feast' (FB) ed. and tr. G. Henderson, ITS II, from LU 99b etc. Compilation of two O.Ir. versions: Roscad poems, subtitles, runs. Ulster cycle: Bricriu provokes the rivalry of Cú Chulainn, Conall Cernach, and Laegaire Buadach for the 'Champion's Portion' at his feast, eventually Cú Chulainn wins in a beheading contest with the disguised Cú Ruí. Oral, Ireland.

Fled Dúin na nGéd 'Fest of the Fort of the Geese' (FDG) ed. C. Marstrander, Christiania 1910, from YBL etc. Mid.Ir.: syllabic poems, runs. King-tale of 7thc.: Congal Claen takes offence that at the feast he has a hen's egg, everyone else a goose's; he raises an army in Scotland to fight the battle of Mag Rath.

Fochond Loingse Fergusa maic Róich 'The Cause of Fergus mac Róich's Exile' (FLF) TBC remscéla II. Ed. and tr. V. Hull, ZCP XVIII 295; 9thc. fragment in LL 252b. Run describes two hideous warriors who

appear for a feast in Emain. Ulster cycle.

Fogluim Con Culainn 'Cú Chulainn's Education' (Fog.CC) ed. and tr.

W. Stokes, RC XXIX 109-152, from 18thc. MSS.15thc.: runs. Ulster cycle: Cú Chulainn goes for training in arms to Scotland, Scáthach in Scythia, and Aife, whom he leaves pregnant. Oral, Ireland and Scotland.

Forbasa Sieges' List A, 9 titles.

Forbais Dromma Damgaire 'Siege of Druim Damgaire' (Forb.DD) List A.

Ed. and tr. (French) M. Sjoestedt, RC LXIII 1-123, from Lismore etc. 15thc.: roscad (RC LXIV pp.157-186) and syllabic poems, runs, subtitles. Cycle of Cormac mac Airt, 3rdc.: Cormac claims double tribute from Munster, opposed by Fiacha Muillethain and Mog Ruith the Druid.

Forbais Fer Fálga 'Siege of the Men of Fálga' (Forb.FF) Lists A, B

gnáthscél. Ed. K. Meyer, ZCP VIII 564, from Eg. 1782 etc. (in CDS).

Early 8thc.: prose paragraph, roscada. Ulster cycle: Cú Chulainn and Cú Ruí carry off spoils (see ACR).

Genemain Chormaic uí Chuinn 'Begetting of Cormac grandson of Conn'

ed. SG I 253-256, from BB etc. Late M.Ir.: roscad and syllabic poems, runs. King-tale of 3rdc.: Cormac begotten the night before his father's death and brought up in obscurity, his accession to the kingship in Tara and his eventual death. (Compert Chorbmaic in List B.)

Immaccallam in dá Thuarad 'Conversation of the Two Sages', partially

ed. and tr. W. Stokes, RC XXVI 4-64, from LL 186a etc. O.Ir.:

roscada, itinerary. Ulster cycle: the chief ollamh dies, after a poetic contest his son Néde agrees Ferchertne is more worthy to



succeed him.

Immram 'Rowing about' List A, 3 titles.

Immram Brain maic Febail ocus a Echtra 'The Voyage of Bran son of Febal and his adventure' (Imr. Brain) ed. and tr. K. Meyer, Voyage of Bran vol. I, from LU 121a etc. O. & M.Ir. from CDS. Syllabic verse. A woman invites Bran to an Otherworld 'Land of Women', on the way the sea-god Manannán prophesies the birth of his son Mongán (7thc.) compared to the birth of Christ (Echtra Brain, List B).

Immram (Curaig) Maele Duín 'The Voyage of Mael Duín('s Currach)' (Imr CM), List A. Ed. and tr. H. Oskamp, The Voyage of Mael Duín, from YBL etc. O.Ir. ; runs, syllabic verse. Mael Duín sets out to avenge his father's murder; the voyage takes him to 34 marvellous islands, of wonders and holy hermits; at the last, converted, he makes peace with the murderers.

Immram (Curraig) hUa gCorra 'The Voyage of the Uí Chorra('s' Currach)' (Imr CC) List A. Ed. and tr. W. Stokes, RC XIV 22-69, from Fermoy etc. 11thc.; poem, runs. Three wicked sons born after parents fast on the devil repent, take to sea, visit 15 marvellous islands, and see the punishments of various sinners.

Imtheachta Aeniasa 'Travels of Aeneas' (Imth Aen) ed. and tr. G. Calder, ITS VI, from BB, sole MS. Late M.Ir., runs. Adaptation of Aeneid.

Leighes Coise Chéin 'The Healing of Cian's Leg' (LCC) ed. SG,I 296-305 from Eg. 1781 etc. 17thc.: Frame tale: Cian's leg broken by an Otherworld woman, won't have it set until he has been told stories. Oral, Scotland and Ireland.

(Longes 'Exile') List A, 4 titles.

Longes Mac n-Duif n-Dermait 'Exile of the Sons of Doel Dermait'

(Lg. DD) Ed. and tr. E. Windisch, IT II 1, from YBL, sole MS.

M.Ir., roscad and syllabic poems, runs. Ulster cycle: Cú Chulainn sent on quest to discover the story of the exile, restores the sons of Doel Dermait to their land.

Longes Mac nUislienn 'Exile of the Sons of Uisliu' (also Uisnech)

(Lg) Ed. and tr. V. Hull, 'The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu, from

ll 259b etc. O.Ir., roscad and syllabic poems, including description.

Ulster cycle: Deirdre is fated at birth, but brought up as a wife for Conchobar. She gets Naise son of Uisliu and his brothers to carry her off to Scotland. Conchobar invites them back and kills the brothers, despite Fergus' guarantee. Deirdre kills herself, while Fergus joins Ailill and Medb. Later versions: OCU, Deirdire.

Macgnímartha Finn 'Boyhood Deeds of Finn' ed. K. Meyer, RC V 195-204

(tr. Ériu I 180-190) from Laud 610, sole MS M.Ir., syllabic poems.

Finn gets his name and his poetic knowledge when he licks his thumb burnt cooking a magic salmon. Oral, Ireland and Scotland.

Marbad Cúil Duib 'Killing of Cúil Dub' ed. and tr. V. Hull, Speculum

XVI 329, from YBL etc. O. and M.Ir., roscad itinerary. Finn-tale:

Otherworld Cúil Dub steals Finn's rations, he pursues and kills him at the entrance to the mound; door shuts on Finn's thumb, whence he gets his magic knowledge.

Merugad Uilix maic Leirtis 'Wandering of Ulysses son of Laertes', ed.

and tr. K. Meyer, The Irish Odyssey, London 1886, from D IV 2

etc. late 12thc., run. Ulysses follows three wise pieces of advice to get home. Later ed. Med & Mod. XVII R.T. Meyer. (Mer. Uilix)

Mesca Ulad 'The Drunkenness of the Ulstermen' (MU) List B gnáthscél.

Ed. J. Carmichael Watson, Med. and Mod. Ir. Ser. XIII; tr. SGS V

(1938) 1-33. Both versions incomplete. I LU 19a, O.Ir., syllabic poem. II LL 261b, M.Ir., syllabic poems, runs. Ulster cycle: Ulaid trapped by Men of Ireland in Tara Luachair. (Also called Baothréim Ulad, List B gnáthscél).

Oidheadh, see Aided.

Orgain 'Destruction'. List A, 35 titles: B, 43 titles.

Orgain Chathrach Boirche 'Destruction of Cathair Boirche' List A, B.

Extant in Cathréim Conghail Chláiringhnigh, pp. 168-182 q.v.

Orgain Chathrach Con Ruí 'Destruction of Cu Ruí's Citadel' List B.

Extant as Aided Con Ruí q.v.

Orgain Dind Ríg 'Destruction of Dinn Ríg' List A, B; ed. and tr.

W. Stokes, (also ed. D. Greene Med & Mod Ser XVI,) ZCP II 1-14, from

LL 269a etc. 10thc.: roscad and syllabic quatrains. King-tale:

Labraid Loingsech becomes king of Leinster.

Orgain Dúin Bolg 'Destruction of the Fort of the Bags' List B.

Extant in Bórama para. 119.

Orgain Echach for a Macaib 'Eochu's destruction of his sons' List

A, B. Extant as Cath Cumair.

Orgain Maic Da Thó 'Destruction of Mac Da Thó' List A, B. Extant as

Scéla Muicce Meic Da Thó.

Prúll: The word in Cormac's Glossary (Sanas Cormaic) illustrated by a Mid Ir. version of a poetic contest found in Tromdám Guaire.

Ed and tr. W. Stokes, Three Irish Glossaries p.36, from LB; Phil.

Soc. Trans. (1891) p 180, from Laud 610. Syllabic couplets, runs.

Scél, Scéla (pl) 'Story, Tidings'



Scél Baile Binnbér-laig maic Buain 'Story of sweet-voiced Baile son<sup>of</sup> Buain' ed. and tr. K. Meyer, RC XIII 220-227, from Harl. 5280 etc. 10thc.; syllabic poems. Trees grow from the graves of ill-fated lovers Baile and Aillemn; when tablets from the two trees meet they stick fast together.

Scéla Cano meic Gartnán 'Stories of Cano son of Gartnán' (Sc. Cano) ed. D. Binchy, Med and Mod Ir. Ser XVIII, from YBL, sole MS. 9th and 11thc.; syllabic poems, runs. King-tale of 7thc. Cano's travels to Ireland, love for Créd, return to Scotland and death.

Scéla Mucce Meic Da Thó 'Tidings of Mac Dathó's Pig' (Sc. MMD) ed. R. Thurneysen, Med and Mod Ir. Ser VI, from LL etc., [ed. and tr. K. Meyer, Hibernica Minora, from Rawl. B512 etc.] O.Ir., syllabic poem, roscad. Later recension, ed. and tr. K. Meyer Hib. Min. from Rawl B.512, adds further syllabic quatrains. Ulster cycle: Ulster and Connaught champions seeking Mac Dathó's hound are invited together to feast on his pig. Cet mac Mágach succeeds in claiming the Champion's Portion till Conall Cernach arrives, then general fighting ensues.

Serc 'Love' List A, 3 titles; B, 4 titles. None extant as such.

Serc Créde do Chanann mac Gartnán 'Créd's love for Cano son of Gartnán' List B. Extant in Scéla Cano maic Gartnán, q.v.

Serc Duibe Lacha do Mongán 'Dub Lacha's Love for Mongán' List A, B Extant as Tóraigheacht Duibhe Lacha, q.v.

Seirglige Con Culainn 'Cú Chulainn's Lying Sick' List B gnáthscél.

Ed. and tr. M. Dillon, Med. and Mod. Ir. Ser. XIV and SGS VII, from LU 43a etc. 9th and 11thc.: roscad and syllabic poems.

Ulster cycle: Cú Chulainn lured by woman to fight in the Otherworld.

Siaburcharpát Con Culainn 'Cú Chulainn's Spectral Chariot' Ed. and tr. J. O'Beirne Crowe, JRHASI I 348-371, from LU 113a etc. 10thc.: syllabic poems, runs. St. Patrick resurrects Cú Chulainn for king Loegaire mac Néill.

Sluagad 'Hosting' List A, B, same 4 titles. None extant as such.

Táin 'Driving, Cattle-raid' List A, 11 titles, B, 4-5 titles.

Táin Bó Cualnge 'The Cattle-raid of Cooley'. Lists A, B, and B, gnáthscél. TBC I ed. and tr. C. O'Rahilly from LU and YBL etc. O. Ir. with 11thc. episodes: syllabic poems, many roscada, runs.

Subtitles in the texts and (YBL) list of Dinda na Tána 1.2747.

TBC II ed and tr. C. O'Rahilly from LL 53b, sole MS: M.Ir. roscad and syllabic poems, runs, subtitles. TBC Stowe ed. C. O'Rahilly from 17thc. MSS: 15thc. modernization; many of roscada now omitted.

Introduction added in II. Chief tale of Ulster cycle: Ailill and Medb of Connaught gather an army to get the Brown Bull 'Donn

Cualnge' from Ulster while the Ulstermen are affected by the ces, Fergus tells them about the early deeds of Cú Chulainn who keeps their army at bay with a series of single combats. Eventually the armies fight and the Brown Bull destroys the Connaught bull

'Findbennach'. Oral, Ireland and Scotland. Major episodes: Brisleach

Maige Muirthemne 'The Slaughter of the Plain of Muirthemne' BMM

(List B gnáthscél); Comrac Fir Diad 'The Encounter with Fer Diad'

CFD (Aided Fir Diad, List A); Fuili Cethirn 'Cethern's Wounds' FC,

Macgní<sup>5</sup>mátha Con Culainn 'Cú Chulainn's Boyhood Deeds'; Toichim ina

mBuidhen 'The Approach of the Companies' TB (List B Gnáthscél).

Táin Bó Dartada 'Raiding of Dartaid's Cattle' List A, B, TBC

remscéla (ii). Ed. and tr. E. Windisch, IT II<sub>2</sub>, from YBL etc. 9thc.:

run. Ulster cycle: Orlam son of Ailill and Medb carries off

Dartaid and her cows, incited by people from the Otherworld.

Táin Bó Flidaise 'Raiding of Flidais'<sup>cattle</sup> List A, TBC remscél. Two versions: I ed. and tr. (German) E. Windisch, IT II 2, from LL 247a etc. Short O.Ir. version: II ed. and tr. D. MacKinnon, Celtic Review I p.296f- IV, from Glenmasan MS (15thc.) etc. 15thc.; roscad and syllabic poems, runs. Ulster cycle: Fergus kills Oilill Finn, king of the Gamhanra<sup>dh</sup>, to get his wife Flidais and her Otherworld cow.

Táin Bó Fraích (TBFr) 'Raiding of Fraech's Cattle' List A, B; TBC remscéla(ii). Ed. W. Meid, Med. and Mod. Ir. Ser. XXII, from LL 248a etc. O.Ir., runs. Ulster cycle: Otherworld Fraech promises his help in return for Ailill and Medb's daughter Findabair; with Conall Cernach rescues his wife, children and cattle carried off to the Alps. Metric version oral, Scotland.

Táin Bó Regamain 'Raiding of Regamon's Cattle'; TBC remscéla(i). Ed. and tr. E. Windisch, IT II 2, from YBL etc. O.Ir.: Ulster cycle: Ailill and Medb's seven sons called Maine carry off Regamon's seven daughters and their cattle.

Táin Bó Regamna 'Cattle-Raid of Regamna' List B; TBC remscéla(ii). Ed. and tr. (German) E. Windisch, IT II 2, from YBL etc. O.Ir.: roscad, Ulster cycle: Cú Chulainn vainly attacks the Badb/Morrígan driving a cow from Sídh Cruachan; she prophesies their encounter in Táin Bó Cuailnge.

Táin Bó Rois 'Cattle-Raid of Ros' List A. Extant in Aided Chonchobuir, Ulster cycle. IHK p.535.

Tochmarc 'Wooing' List A, 13 titles; B, 2-3 titles.

Tochmarc Ailbe (ingine Cormaic la Finn) 'Wooing of Ailbhe (daughter of Cormac by Finn)' List A, B. Ed. and tr. (German) R. Thurneysen,



ZCP XIII 250-282 etc., from H.3.17 etc. 10thc; roscad and syllabic poems, runs. Finn cycle: Finn tests Ailbhe with riddles, and marries her, after Gráinne's elopement with Diarmaid. Oral, Scotland(WHT III.36).

Tochmarc Becfhola 'Wooring of Becfhola' ed. and tr. B. O'Looney, PRIA Ir. MS Series 1, from YBL etc. O.Ir., runs, quatrains. King-tale of 7thc.: Becfhola becomes wife of Diarmaid son of Aed Sláine, then leaves him for a warrior from the Otherworld.

Tochmarc Mnaí Cruinn 'Wooring of Cruinn's Wife' List A. Extant titled:

Tochmarc Cruinn ocus Macha 'Wooring of Cruinn and Macha', ed. and tr. (German) R. Thurneysen, ZCP XII (1918) 251-4, from H.3.18. Short, genealogies. Ulster cycle: Cruinn boasts of the speed of his Otherworld wife; Conchobar makes her race his horses, after which she bears twins and dies, cursing the Ulstermen with the 'ces'.

Tochmarc Emire 'Wooring of Emer' Lists A, B, TBC remscéla(1). Ed. A. van Hamel Med.and Mod. Ir. Ser. III, from LU 121a, D IV 2 etc. O. and M. Ir., roscad (Verba Scáthaige), runs. Ulster cycle: Cú Chulainn woos Emer, returns and claims her after adventures oversea.

Tochmarc Étaíne 'Wooring of Étaín' List A, B. Three tales extant, Ed. and tr. O. Bergin and R. Best, Ériu XII 5-196, from YBL, LU 129a etc. 9th and 11thc.; roscad (TE (iii)) and syllabic poems, runs. Mythological tale:

- (i) Oengus wins Étaín d. of Ailill for Mídir, whose jealous wife Fuamnach bespells her into a fly. Étaín is swallowed and reborn, as a mortal, to Étar's wife. Metric version from LL 109b ed. and tr. L. Gwynn, Ériu VII 210-238.

(ii) Étaín marries Eochaid Airem king of Tara; Midir makes her brother-in-law lovesick for her but himself appears at their tryst. Later version from Eg. 1782 ed. and tr. (German) E. Windisch, Ir. Texte I pp.113-133.

(iii) Midir wins gamble with Eochaid and carries off Étaín. Eochaid digs up the Otherworld mounds in pursuit; Midir returns to him not Étaín but her daughter, now full-grown, so that Eochaid puts away their child, who becomes Mess Buachalla, the mother of Conaire Mór.

Tochmarc Ferbe 'Wooring of Ferb' (T. Ferbe) List A, TBC remscéla (i).

Extant in two versions, ed. and tr. E. Windisch, (German) IT III 2.

I: 10thc. from Eg. 1782, roscad, run. Short.

II: M.Ir. 12thc. from LL 253a, roscad and syllabic poems, runs.

Ulster cycle: Conchobar, incited by Otherworld woman, attacks Maine, son of Ailbhall and Medb, while he is wooing Ferb daughter of Gerg; the booty from Gerg's fort includes the vat Ól nGuala.

Tochmarc Fithirne ocus Dáirine dá ingen Tuathail (Techtmar) 'Wooring

of Fithirne and Dáirine, Tuathal Techtmar's two daughters' List A.

King-tale of 1stc.; extant in Bórama paras. 1-5, Acallam 1.4125 ff., q.v.

Tochmarc Treblainne 'Wooring of Treblann' ed. K. Meyer, ZCP XIII 166-175, from Fermoy. E.Mod.Ir., syllabic poems, runs. Mythological:

Fraech woos Treblann, leaves her with his life-token; she dies of grief when Midir destroys it by magic.

Tochomlad 'Proceeding/Advancing' List A, B, same 13 titles. None extant as such.

Tochomlad Loingse Fergus a hUltaib 'Progress of Fergus' Exiled

Company from Ulster.' List A, B. Ulster cycle, see FLF, Lg, pp.390,393.

Togail 'Destroying' List A, 5 titles, B 10 + 7 titles (two groups).

Togail Bruidne Da Choca 'Sack of Da Choca's Hall' List A, B.

Extant as Bruiden Da Choca, q.v.

Togail Bruidne Da Derga 'Sack of Da Derga's Hall' (TBDD) List A, B.

Ed. and tr. W. Stokes, RC XXII 9 ff., from LU 83a etc. 9th and 11thc.: roscada and syllabic quatrain, subtitles, runs. King-tale: Conaire King of Tara is forced by circumstance to break all his geasa and dies ambushed in Da Derga's banqueting hall.

Togail Troí 'Sack of Troy' (TTroí) List B. Extant in two fragmentary versions, ed. and tr. W. Stokes:

I Calcutta 1881, from LL 217a. References from Dipl. Ed., ll.

30820-32877. M.Ir.; runs, subtitles.

II IT II 1 from H.2.17. Late M.Ir.: runs, subtitles.

Classical adaptation: Dares Phrygius 'Historia de Excidio Troiae'.

Tomaidm 'Bursting Forth' List A, 2 titles; B, 3 titles. None extant as such.

Tóraigheacht 'Pursuit'. Not in Lists.

Tóraigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne 'Pursuit of Diarmaid and Gráinne' (TDG) Different versions ed. and tr. S. O'Grady, Oss. 1885, from 18thc. MSS; N. ní Shéaghda, ITS XLVIII, from 17thc. MS.

Syllabic poems, runs. Finn tale: Gráinne daughter of king Cormac gets Diarmaid to elope with her, although she is betrothed to Finn; Finn refuses to heal Diarmaid mortally wounded by a boar. Oral, Ireland and Scotland.

Tóraigheacht Dhuibhe Lacha Láimh-Ghile 'Pursuit of White-Armed

Dubh Lacha' (TDL) I ed. and tr. K. Meyer, Voyage of Bran I, from



Fermoy. E.Mod.Ir., syllabic poems, run. II ed. S.Ó Duilearga,  
ZCP XVII 347-370, from 19thc. MS., run. King-tale of 7thc.:  
Mongan's birth, and rescue, by a trick, of his wife Dubh Lacha from  
the king of Leinster.

Tóraigheacht in Ghilla Dheacair agus a Chapail 'Pursuit of the  
troublesome Gillie (TGD) and his Horse'. Ed. SGI 257-275, from 18thc.  
MSS. Syllabic poems, runs. Romantic Finn tale: Fenians have  
supernatural adventures fighting the Gilla Deacair whose horse  
beat theirs.

Tóraigheacht Gruaidhe Griansholus 'Pursuit of Sun-bright Cheek' (TGG)  
ed. and tr. C. O.'Rahilly, ITS XXIV, from 17thc. MS. E.Mod.Ir., syllabic  
poems, runs. Romantic Ulster tale: Cú Chulainn pursues giant to  
rescue Gruadh Griansholus, wins fight with gae bolga. Oral, Ireland.

Tóraigheacht Shaidhbhe ingine Eóghain Óig 'Pursuit of Sadhbh  
daughter of Eóghan Óg' (TS) ed. GGG. Syllabic poems, runs.  
Romantic Finn-tale: Sadhbh is abducted while swimming, rescued by  
Fenians, who at length kill her revengeful abductor. Oral, Ireland.

Tóraigheacht Taisí Taoibhghile 'Pursuit of White-Sided Taise' (TTT)  
ed. M. ní Mhuirgheasa, LSS XVI, from 17thc. MSS. 16thc. lang.,  
archaizing. Syllabic poems, runs. Romantic Finn-tale: Taise  
sails to Howth, bespells Finn to follow her; oversea adventures.

Tromdám Guaire 'Guaire's Oppressive Company' ed. and tr. O. Connellan,  
Oss V; ed. M. Joynt, Med. and Mod. Ir. Ser. II, from Lismore. E.Mod.  
Ir.; roscad and syllabic poems, runs. King-tale of 7thc.: poets  
make excessive demands on Guaire's generosity; his hermit half-  
brother Marbán retaliates by sending them away to find TEC, which  
they have all forgotten.

Uath 'Horrible thing'/'Cave' (Thurneysen)/'Hiding' (Meyer). List A, 10 titles.

Uath Beinne Étair 'Uath of the Hill of Howth' List A. Extant untitled; ed. and tr. K. Meyer, RC XI 125-134, from Harl. 5280, sole MS. M.Ir.: syllabic poem. Finn cycle, part of the tale of Diarmaid and Gráinne (not in TDG): they hide in a cave on Howth, are rescued by Oengus of the Brug.

Bibliography II Books, Articles, Manuscripts, and Abbreviations.

(P = Periodical)

- AFM      Annals of the Four Masters ed. J. O'Donovan. 7 vols, Dublin 1856.
- AI      Annals of Innisfallen ed. R.I. Best and E. Mac Néill. Dublin, London 1933.
- AIL      Ancient Laws of Ireland ed. J. O'Donovan etc. 6 vols, Rolls Series. Dublin, London 1865-1901.
- Anecd.      Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts. 5 vols, Halle 1907-13.
- Arch.      Archiv für Celtische Lexicographie P Halle 1901-6.
- AT      Aarne-Thompson 'The Types of the Folktale' Folklore Fellows Communications no. 184, Helsinki 1964.
- AU      Annals of Ulster ed. W.M. Hennessy. 4 vols, Dublin 1887-1901.
- Auraicept      Auraicept na nÉces ed. and tr. G. Calder, Edinburgh 1917.
- Béal.      Béaloideas P. Dublin 1928 -
- O. Bergin      Irish Bardic Poetry, Dublin 1970. (ed. F. Kelly and D. Greene)
- D. Binchy      1943      The Linguistic and Historical Value of the Irish Law Tracts. PBA XXIX 195-228.
- 1958      The Date and Provenance of Uraicecht Becc Ériu XVIII 44-54.  
                 The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara Ériu XVIII 113-138.
- 1961      The Background to Early Irish Literature Studia Hibernica I 7-18.
- 1972      Varia Hibernica 1. The so-called 'rhetorics' of Irish Saga.  
                 Indo-Celtica: Gedachtnisschrift für Alf Sommerfelt, ed. Pilch and Thurow, Munich. pp. 29-38.
- BNE      Bethada Naem nÉrenn Lives of Irish Saints ed. and tr. C. Plummer. 2 vols, Oxford 1922.
- A. Bruford      1966      Gaelic Folktales and Mediaeval Romances Béal. XXXIV (1966) Dublin 1969.
- Caesar      see J. Tierney, 1960.
- J. Carney      1955      Studies in Irish Literature and History, Dublin.



- CDS      Cín Dromma Snechtai.
- Cóir Anmann    The Fitness of Names    ed. and tr. W. Stokes, IT III 2 (1897).
- CR      Celtic Review    P.    Edinburgh 1905-16.
- Death Tales    Death Tales of the Ulster Heroes    ed. and tr. K. Meyer  
RIA Todd Lecture Series XIV, Dublin 1906.
- J. Delargy    1945    The Gaelic Storyteller    PBA XXXI 177-221 (printed  
separately, begins p. 3).
- Dindshenchus    Place-name Lore.    Prose:    ed. and tr. W. Stokes    RC XV  
272 f. XVI 31 f.  
Verse:    see Met.Dinds.
- Diodorus Siculus    see J. Tierney    1960.
- Dioghluim Dána    Bardic Poems    ed. L. Mac Cionnaith, Dublin 1938.
- Edin.      Edinburgh MSS, once in the Advocates' Library, now in the  
National Library of Scotland.
- Eg.      Egerton MSS in the British Museum.
- Ét.Celt.    Études Celtiques    P.    Paris 1936 -
- R. Flower    1947    The Irish Tradition, Oxford.
- Fr.      Franciscan MSS in Killiney, Dublin.
- GGG      Gadaidhe GEAR na Geamh-oidhche.    Tales from Maynooth MSS, ed.  
T. Ó Gallchobhair, P. ua Cuain, T. Mac Giolla-Fhiomáin.  
Dublin 1915.
- GJ      The Gaelic Journal    P.    Dublin 1882-1909.
- GOI      R. Thurneysen    Grammar of Old Irish, Dublin 1946.
- D. Greene    1969    The Chariot as described in Irish Literature, in The  
Iron Age in the Irish Sea Province, Council for  
British Archaeology Research Report 9.  
  
1972    The Responsive in Irish and Welsh; in Indo-Celtica,  
Gedachtnisschrift für Alf Sommerfelt    ed. Pilch and  
Thurrow    Munich    pp. 59-72.
- Harl.      Harleian MSS in the British Museum.
- K. Hughes    1958    Irish Scriptoria, in Studies in the Early British  
Church    ed. N.K. Chadwick (Cambridge).  
  
1966    The Church in Early Irish Society (London).
- IFC      Irish Folklore Commission    MSS.

- IHK R. Thurneysen Die Irische Helden und Königsage, Halle 1921.
- Ir.Texts Irish Texts ed. J. Fraser, P. Grosjean and J. O'Keeffe. 5 vols, London 1931-3.
- IT Irische Texte ed. E. Windisch and W. Stokes. 4 series, Leipzig 1880-1909.
- ITS Irish Texts Society publications. London 1899-1936, Dublin 1937-
- K. Jackson LHEB Language and History in Early Britain, Edinburgh 1953.  
1964 The Oldest Irish Tradition, a Window on the Iron Age (Cambridge).
- LF Leabhar na Féinne Oral texts ed. J.F. Campbell, London 1872.
- Lismore Lives Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore, ed. and tr. W. Stokes, Oxford 1890.
- LL The Book of Leinster ed. R.I. Best, O. Bergin, and M.A. O'Brien. 5 vols, Dublin 1954-67.
- LML Loinnir mac Leabhair Oral tales ed. S. Mac Giollarnáth, Dublin 1936.
- LSÍC Leabhar Sheáin í Chonail Oral tales ed. S. Ó Duilearga,
- LSS Leabhair ó Láimhsgríbhneibh Series ed. G. Ó Murchadha, Dublin 1941-54.
- LU Lebor na hUidre ed. R.I. Best and O. Bergin, Dublin 1929.
- S. mac Airt 1958 Filidecht and Coimne Ériu XVIII 139-52.
- P. mac Cana Celtica VII (1966) 65-90 On the use of the term Retoiric.  
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Et.Celt. XIII (1972-3) 61-119 Conservation and Innovation in Celtic Literature.  
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Ériu XXVI (1975) 33-52 On the Prehistory of Immram Brain.
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- Med. & Mod. (MMIS) Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series. Occasional, Dublin 1931.
- Met.Dinds. The Metrical Dindshenchus ed. and tr. E. Gwynn. 5 volumes, RIA Todd Lecture Series 7-12, Dublin 1900-35.
- G. Murphy Duanaire Fhinn 3 vols. ITS VII (ed. E. Mac Néill), XVIII, XLIII (1908, 1933, 1953).  
1961 Saga and Myth in Ancient Ireland. Dublin.
- MV Mittelirische Vehrslehren ed. R. Thurneysen IT III 1, 1891.
- MWHT More West Highland Tales, ed. and tr. J.G. MacKay from J.F. Campbell MSS. Edinburgh, 2 vols: I 1940, II 1960.
- O'Davoren Irish Glossary ed. and tr. W. Stokes. Arch. II (1903-4) 197-504.
- T.F. O'Rahilly 1922 A Miscellany of Irish Proverbs Dublin.
- Oss Transactions of the Ossianic Society. P, Dublin 1855 (6 vols).
- PBA Proceedings of the British Academy P. London 1901-
- PRIA Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy P. Dublin, 2nd Series 1879-
- Rawl. Rawlinson MSS in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.
- RC Revue Celtique P. Paris 1870-1934.
- RIA Royal Irish Academy publications.
- SC Sanais Cormaic Cormac's Glossary ed. W. Stokes, Three Irish Glossaries and tr. Transactions of the Philological Society (1891).
- SG Silva Gadelica MS tales ed. and tr. S.H. O'Grady. 2 vols, text and trans., London 1892.
- Sg.D. Sgialachdan Dhunnchaidh ed. K.C. Craig, Glasgow 1944.
- SGS Scottish Gaelic Studies P. Aberdeen, 1926-
- Sg.R. Sgéalta Romansuíochta MS tales ed. M. ní Muirgheasa and S. Ó Ceithearnaigh, LSS 16, Dublin 1952.
- SS Scottish Studies P. Edinburgh 1957-
- Stowe Stowe MSS in the Royal Irish Academy.
- Tadg Dall Ó hUiginn Poems ed. and tr. E. Hull, ITS XXII and XXIII (1920, 1921).



- TGSI Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness. P.  
Inverness 1871-
- R. Thurneysen see GOI, IHK.
- J. Tierney 1960 The Celtic Ethnography of Poseidonius (with texts of  
Athenaus, Strabo, Diodorus Siculus, Julius Caesar)  
PRIA LX C 202.
- Triads The Triads of Ireland ed. and tr. K. Meyer RIA Todd  
Lecture Series XIII 1906.
- V. of Bran The Voyage of Bran A. Nutt 2 vols, London 1895.
- WHT Popular Tales of the West Highlands ed. J.F. Campbell  
4 vols, 2nd edn. Paisley and London 1890-3.
- W & S Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition ed. A. Campbell.  
5 vols, London 1889-95.
- YBL The Yellow Book of Lecan, Trinity College Dublin MSS 1318.  
Facsimile ed. R. Atkinson.
- ZCP Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie. P. Halle 1921-

Abbreviations of Tale Titles (See RIA Dictionary, Bruford 1966.)

A (generally Aided)  
AAA Aided Aenfhir Aífe  
ACC Aided Chon Culainn  
ACR Aided Chon Ruí  
A.Fingein Airne Fingein  
Aisl.MC Aislinge Meic Chonglinne  
Aisl. Oeng. Aislinge Oenguso  
Altram TDM Altram Tige Dá Medar

B (generally Bruidhean)  
BRA Bruidhean Bheag na hAlmhaine  
BC Bruidhean Chaorthainn  
BCC Bruidhean Cheise Chorainn  
BCF Bás Cearbhaill 7 Farbhlaidhe  
BCL Bodach an Chóta 7 Lachtana  
BCD Bruiden Da Choca  
BEBD Bruidhean Eochaidh Bhig Dheirg  
BMM Brisleach Maige Muirthemne,  
see TBC.

B.Shuibhne Buile Shuithne

C (generally Cath)  
Caithr.Cong. Cathréim Congail  
Caithr.Toir. Cathréim Toirdhealbhaigh  
CCath. In Cath Cathardha  
CF Cath Finntrágha  
CFD Comrac Fir Diad, see TBC.  
CIL Céilidhe Iosgaide Léithe  
CIG Ceisneamh Ingeine Guill  
CML Cath Maige Léana  
CMM Cath Maige Mucrimé  
CMR Cath Maige Rath  
CMT Cath Maige Tuired, (i) & (ii).  
CNC Coimheasgar na gCuradh  
Cog. Cogadh Gaedheal re Gallaibh  
CRR Cath Ruis na Ríg

DGP Díthreabhach Glinne an Phéice

E (generally Echtra)  
EAC Echtra Airt meic Cuind  
EAD Echtra Aodha Dhuibh  
EAG Echtra Aodha mhic Ghoireachtaidh  
ECCR Echtra an Cheithearnaigh Chaoil  
Riabhaigh  
ECM Echtra Chéadaigh Mhóir  
ECRI Echtra Chloinne Rígh na  
hIoruaidhe  
EGF Echtra Ghiolla an Fhiugha  
EIA Echtra Iollainn Airmdeheirg  
ELSR Echtra Lomnochtáin an tSléibhe  
Riffe  
EME Echtra Mac nEchach Muigmedóin  
EMM Echtra an Mhadra Mhaoil  
EMO Echtra Mhelóra 7 Orlando  
EMC Echtra na gCuradh  
ERL Eachtre Ridire na Leómhan  
ETB Esnada Tige Buchet  
ETC Echtra Thaidhg mhic Chéin

Falls TBC Fallsigud Tána Bó Cualnge  
FB Fled Bricrend  
FC Fuile Cethirn, see TBC.  
FDG Fled Dúin na nGéd  
Fing.Rónáin Fingal Rónáin  
FLF Fochond Loingse Fergusu  
Fog.CC Foghlum Chon Culainn  
Forb.DD Forbais Dromma Damghaire  
Forb.FF Forbais Fer Fálgae  
FTC Feis Tighe Chonáin

Imm.in dá Th. Immacallam in dá  
Thuarad

Imr. Brain Immram Brain  
Imr.CC Immram Curaig Ua gCorra  
Imr.CM Immram Curaig Maele Dúin  
Imth.Aen. Imtheachta Aeniasa

LCC Leigheas Coise Céin  
Lg. Longes Mac nUislenn  
Lg.DD Longes Mac nDuil Dermait

Mer.Uilix Merugad Uilix  
MU Mesca Ulad

OCL Oidheadh Chloinne Lir  
OCT Oidheadh Chloinne Tuireann  
OCU Oidheadh Chloinne Uisneach  
Org.DR Orgain Dind Ríg

Sc.Cano Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin  
Sc.MMD Scéla Muicce Meic Da Thó

T (generally Tochmarc, Tóraigheacht)  
TB (generally Táin Bó)

T.Ailbhe Tochmarc Ailbhe  
TB Tochim na mBuiden, see TBC.  
TBC Táin Bó Cualnge  
TBDD Togail Bruidne Da Derga  
T.Becfhola Tochmarc Becfhola  
TBFlid. Táin Bó Flidaise  
TBFr. Táin Bó Fraích  
TDG Tóraigheacht Dhiarmada 7  
Ghráinne

TDL Tóraigheacht Dhuibhe Lacha  
TE Tochmarc Étaíne, (i), (ii), & (iii).  
TEmere Tochmarc Emere  
TFerbe Tochmarc Ferbe  
TGD Tóraigheacht an Ghilla Dheacair  
TGG Tóraigheacht Ghruaidhe Grian-  
sholus

TS Tóraigheacht Shaidhbhe  
TTebe Togail na Tebe  
T.Treblainne Tochmarc Treblainne  
TTroi Togail Troi  
TTT Tóraigheacht Taise Taoibhghile